

YOUNG CASTAWAYS



ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

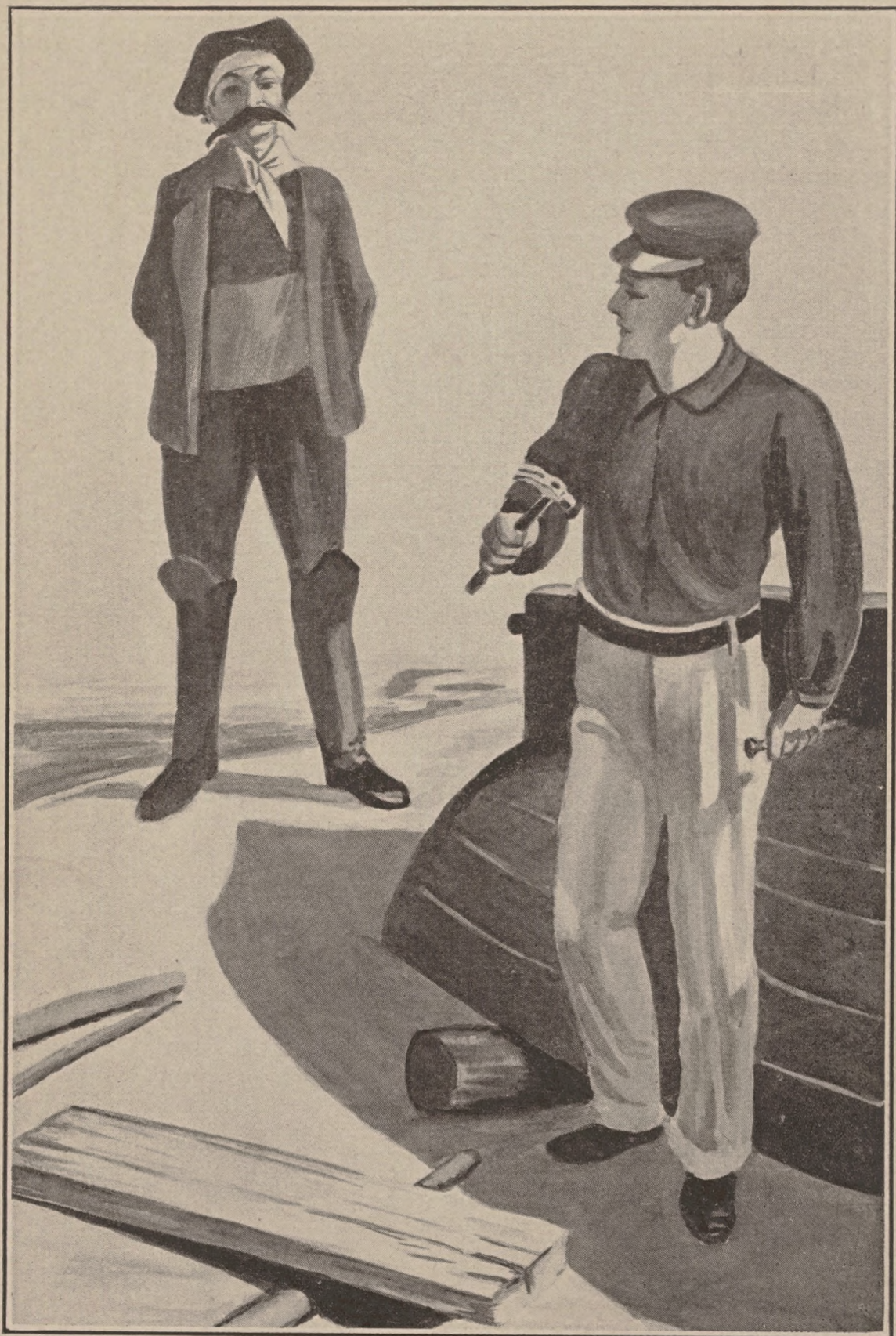


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HE SAW THE CAPTAIN HOVERING, NOT FAR AWAY.
(Page 100.)

YOUNG CASTAWAYS

OR
MAROONED ON A SAND-KEY IN THE
CARIBBEAN

BY

St. George Rathborne

AUTHOR OF

"DOWN THE AMAZON," "ADRIFT ON A JUNK,"
"YOUNG VOYAGERS OF THE NILE," ETC.

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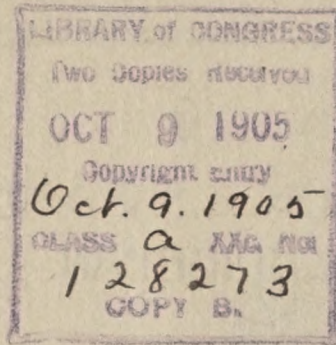
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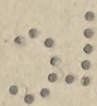
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He saw the captain hovering, not far away	Frontispiece	✓
He had the satisfaction of dragging a prize from the sea	48	✓
"Glory! It's the Loon!"	150	✓
It was a shark	200	✓

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CHAPTER I.

TWO OF A KIND.

As the sun of a November day crept over the watery horizon of the old Atlantic, somewhere off the coast of Florida, his first rays fell upon a strange object that rose and dipped with the heaving bosom of the vasty deep. As far as the eye could reach there was no sign of land, nothing to break the dull monotony of sea and sky.

This floating object, now on the crest of a billow and anon sliding down into a valley, had the appearance of a wreck on a diminutive scale. In fact, it proved to be the remains of what had once been a staunch single-hand cruiser, such as bold young Corinthians delight to trust

their fortunes to while enjoying trips along the protected waters of the Atlantic seaboard. The mast had been carried away bodily by the savage gusts of wind that had swooped down upon the luckless adventurer, and apparently the only thing that kept the craft from disappearing under the surface was the fact that several airtight, galvanized chambers had been built into the hull of the little cruiser.

Such a diminutive vessel could never have been constructed for outside work, and her presence on the treacherous Atlantic must therefore be the result of an accident. At any rate the crew of the mosquito craft had not been washed overboard when the mast and sail were carried away, for crouched aft could be seen a drenched and forlorn figure, that raised upon hands and knees, when the boat crested a billow, searched eagerly for some sign of a friendly sail, or a glimpse of land to leeward.

The castaway appeared to be a lad of some sixteen or seventeen summers, though well proportioned for his age, and with the rugged

bronze of health on his face that could only come from an outdoor life.

Though naturally anxious concerning his condition he was not now alarmed as when the storm was at its height, with the cruel waves dashing over the waterlogged craft and seeking to tear him loose from the ropes with which he had secured his person to a thwart.

“Twenty hours of this sort of thing has knocked all the fun out of it for me, and I’d give considerable to set eyes on a sail, even if only some sponger of the sand-keys. Boat a wreck, provisions soaked, and the whole blessed expedition gone to the dogs. Ugh! I never want to repeat that experience again. Fifty times I thought my time had surely come, yet here I am with what is left of the outfit, drifting goodness knows where, and as hungry as a hawk. Wonder if I could lay hands on a snack, no matter what shape it’s in. Well, here goes for a try, anyhow.” Evidently the forlorn cast-away thought to put an artificial courage in his heart by thus communing with himself, after

the manner of many persons exposed to a menacing peril.

He believed in action, for at once he began a systematic method of fishing down into the submerged portion of the boat's interior, dragging various articles into view, until finally an exclamation of satisfaction announced that he had "struck oil" in some fashion. It proved to be a small chest, about fifteen by thirty inches, and when he had whipped the lid open, eight tin cans, each with a capacious screw-top, were revealed. Evidently this was the "grub-chest" of the expedition. He eagerly seized upon a can which he appeared to know from long familiarity, whipped off the lid and inserting his hand, drew out some hard-tack, or ship-biscuit, together with a bit of cheese.

He fell to like one half-starved, and presently, feeling a-thirst, picked up the water can lying between his feet, to indulge in a swig from its brackish contents, the liquid having been secured at some rude spring along the Georgia coast. And possibly Teddy McGregor

had never better enjoyed a good meal in all his young life, since it is appetite that usually regulates these things for us. And he was truly hungry after his long battle with the savage sea.

By the time he had finished, the waves had very sensibly diminished in volume, a fact he noted with immense satisfaction, since it was difficult work, resisting their coaxing invitation to leave his perch and yield to their embrace. The little boat no longer carried on like a crazy thing, and it was even possible for an agile chap to stand erect in order to take a better survey than had as yet fallen to his lot, though the sensation reminded him of trying to ride a bareback horse in a circus, an experience that had once fallen to his fortune.

As he turned with a sigh of bitter disappointment, to spend a last moment in a perfunctory survey of the quarter from whence his line of drift had proceeded, he gave utterance to an exclamation of surprise and delight; for now that the scud had ceased to fly through the air

he could distinctly see a vessel of some sort bearing down upon him.

A second look caused his feeling of delight to quickly subside, for it was plain to be seen that the craft thus approaching could be no less than a derelict, since one of her rails did not much more than clear the waters' edge, and what sails were bent on her masts had been torn into ribbons by the wolfish winds.

Teddy was gifted with a happy nature that could see great possibilities in what might appear a disappointment to others; and consequently he began to figure how sensibly his chances would be increased by a change of base, leaving the diminutive wreck for the one that possessed greater bulk. He even fished an oar out of the flooded interior and began to scull his clumsy craft after the fashion of one who knew how to get the best results from such a proceeding, his design being to place himself more surely in the way of the derelict than chance had chosen to do for him.

The other vessel, catching so much more of

the early morning wind, was drifting at the rate of two knots to his one, so that it must have left him in the lurch but for the means of propulsion resorted to. And it may be set down as certain that he strained his eyes good and hard as the rival wrecks approached each other, in the endeavor to find out whether the schooner had any living soul aboard.

To his intense disappointment he was forced to believe that it had been wholly abandoned by the crew, when the water gained so fast that it appeared as if the vessel must sink at any moment. He had quite a tussle at the end, in order to accomplish the object in view; but the result was satisfactory, since he found a dangling rope to which he could fasten the painter of his craft; after which he swarmed aboard in approved piratical style.

The slanting deck of the schooner was a sad spectacle of wreck and ruin, though the young fellow felt relieved not to discover any signs of drowned men about.

He was curious to discover what sort of a

bonanza he had happened upon, and immediately started below, to find in the cabin just the same confusion as on deck, with the water flooding the floor to the depth of a foot or more, and almost filling some of the adjoining closet-like rooms. While he was prowling in the cook's galley, discovering an abundance of edibles, such as they were, he heard a sound that had a different ring from the groaning and squeaking of the ancient ship's timbers.

This startled him. After all he might not be the only living thing aboard; so he began a hot hunt high and low, though without success until it occurred to him that he had a voice and should utilize the same. Surely that was an answering hail, indistinct though it seemed.

"Help! come below and let me out! In the cabin! Help!"

Teddy felt a thrill. It was not alone that he realized he had a companion in exile, but the strange fact of this unknown party being fastened in one of the several dingy staterooms connected with the cabin. He had looked in some

while prosecuting his search, but had doubtless skipped the very one that had an occupant.

He now hastened back, calling reassuringly as he went, for the cries had that of human agony in them.

It was easy to locate the door, but being stoutly made it resisted his attempts to open, even as it had long done with respect to the party fastened, with no chance of even climbing out through a window, such was the absurdly small size of the bullseyes lighting the cubby-holes dignified with the name of staterooms. Seeing an ax near by, Teddy seized it with eagerness. Then, warning the prisoner to stand back, he proceeded to make kindling wood of the door in approved style.

When an opening had been made sufficiently large to admit the passage of an ordinary man, he was vastly surprised and pleased to see a lad of about his own age creep through the gap. A little pale around the gills he was after a night penned in such a trap, with a constant fear lest the water creep up above the bullseye, and cause

his death from suffocation, not to mention the chances for a sudden plunge of the craft to the bottom.

His first act was to clutch hold of Teddy and wring his hand as though it had been a pump. "Gee, I tell you I'm glad to see you, old fellow! Help me up on deck where I can get some air. I'm nearly dead for a good gulp, and some water. What's this, a tin pannikin full? Gracious, how delicious it tastes with that salty crust in one's mouth! You didn't come any too soon, I'm telling you, for the old trap feels as if she was ready to take a last plunge mighty quick. The crew deserted while the storm was at its worst, and I'm thinking few of them could have lived through it; but they surely thought the *Nancy Lee* was wallowing her last.

"Of course you wonder how they came to leave me behind, and fastened in a cubbyhole at that; but I'll tell you the whole story all in good time. It was the captain who did it, and he meant that I should never come back to New England again. Now, show me your vessel, my

preserver, and let's get aboard as quick as we can, for fear that this water-logged schooner sink under us."

Teddy scratched his head and looked grave. Then with a smile he led the other to the stern and, pointing to the pitiful little remnant of his cruiser, remarked pathetically:

"I guess you'd better change your mind and stay here."

CHAPTER II.

THE LAST OF THE OLD NANCY.

When the full significance of the situation broke upon the mind of the deserted schooner's lone passenger, he looked queerly at Teddy, and finally burst out into a laugh that had something of mirth in it, despite the gravity of their trouble, for after all he was only a boy, and disasters may easily assume a comical phase with youth.

"Well, I declare, if you weren't worse off than I was hanging to this old wreck. And is it possible that you were sailing in that little dingey so far from shore? I've always considered myself somewhat of a venturesome chap, but I'd think a long time before taking such risks," he said, his hand laid effusively on the arm of the other, for whom a sudden and

natural affection had sprung up in his boyish heart.

It was a case of two kindred souls again; of David and Jonathan being brought together by stress of circumstances.

“Oh, you give me too much credit. You see, I never dreamed of venturing outside, but was blown through one of the inlets of the sound where I had been cruising, being on my way to Florida by the inside water route,” declared Teddy, quickly.

“You must have had an awful time, and come mighty near going under. And to think of our meeting in this strange way! It looks as though we were intended to be companions in trouble. Anyhow, let’s get acquainted, and perhaps we may find it possible to land on some desert island, and play Robinson Crusoe for a while.”

Teddy introduced himself without hesitation. “You see I’m a Canadian, and my father came from Scotland long ago. I’ve been left to do pretty much what I wanted for some years, and besides passing much time in the bush, camping

in summer and with the loggers in winter, I conceived the idea of spending a season cruising in Florida, having read much about the delights of that country. So I had this craft built under my own eye, and started from the St. Lawrence in September, coming down through Champlain to the Hudson, and by degrees working south until that hurricane swept me through an inlet just when I was close to the border of the Promised Land.

“Some other time I’ll tell you what a terrible experience I’ve had trying to keep afloat, and how gloriously glad I was to get a glimpse of this old tub, for you see I didn’t dream that it carried a fellow who was really in a worse position than myself. Now, let me hear something about you, please.”

“Of course you’re curious. Who wouldn’t be?—to find a chap fastened in a stateroom of a waterlogged schooner, and after my hinting that the captain was to blame for my almost going down to Davy Jones’ locker. But you shall hear.

“First, my name is Maro Rolfe, and I am a New England boy all through. Being brought up in the city of New Bedford, I’ve always been perfectly at home on a boat of any description, and even made one or two voyages on vessels that were principally my own. Father left considerable property to me. It’s the old story about an uncle who was made guardian, and who would profit by my being out of the way. I’ve often read such things, but it didn’t seem as though they could occur outside of story books; but I’m learning that real life is pretty much the same as we read about.

“Uncle Simon is one of those sly men, always rubbing his hands together and speaking in oily tones; but I didn’t dream that he wanted to do me any harm, though truth to tell I knew he wouldn’t have mourned greatly had I been fatally hurt when injured several times, once by falling from a yard-arm and again when swept overboard during a storm on the coast. Don’t laugh at me when I tell you the way he succeeded in sending me to sea with Captain Claw-

son, on board the rotten *Nancy Lee*; for it's as old as the hills, I guess, though just as neatly worked today as when our grandfathers were boys.

“Uncle and I came aboard to say good-by to the captain, and the next thing I remember was when I came to my senses in a stuffy little hole, to find myself with a sick headache and the schooner far out at sea. The captain was a vile brute, and threw off the mask after a few days, telling me plainly that I would never go back to New Bedford.

“But what's the use going into details? Why, I could talk for an hour about how he abused me, and taunted me, believing I would never be able to bring him to book. Perhaps I may live to punish the rascal as he deserves, and it will be some satisfaction to me, I'm telling you.

“About the night of the storm. We were tossed about for hours, and when the leaks gained the crew got ready to leave the vessel. It was then Captain Clawson struck me and threw me in my cabin, fastening the door so

that I could not possibly break out. There I stayed, suffering death many times it seemed, until I thought I heard some one moving, and managed to shout, though my lips were so parched I could hardly make a sound.

“The storm was slacking up when they went away, and I’ve thought they could have saved the vessel and her cargo if such a thing had been to their liking; but do you know I’ve an idea uncle must have insured her for much more than she was worth, and that her loss was an arranged thing. In fact, I mean to investigate if such a thing is possible, to satisfy myself about the scuttling business, for such a crime has been done many times to beat the insurance companies, and I wouldn’t put anything past that sailor-man.”

Thus briefly did the two young castaways introduce themselves.

Among boys what more was needed to constitute friendship? And if the bonds wanted cementing surely their sharing a danger in common was quite enough to bring about such a

union. Why, presently they felt as though they had known each other for years, and discovered many mutual likes and dislikes that did much to add to the strength of the sudden friendship.

Their situation was so filled with peril that it demanded immediate attention; so they set about investigating the condition of the unlucky vessel, with the idea of determining just how long they might hope to keep afloat. Slowly but surely the water was gaining, and while they might perhaps ward off the evil hour some by laboring at the pumps, the end was inevitable.

Having decided this question they believed it their best policy to fashion some sort of rude craft, upon which they might hope to keep afloat when the crisis arrived. Both were possessed of considerable enthusiasm and sentiment, so that the work went on apace, and by degrees spars were lashed in a compact form, capable of resisting the action of the waves so long as not subjected to the fury of a storm. This brought them up to noon. They laid off for an hour, in order to rest and snatch a bite, for the sun

shone with considerable power and exhausted them. Conditions presented themselves, however, that urged a speedy resumption of their labor.

The water continued to gain, and clouds crept up along the horizon as though promising another siege of bad weather ere long. If such descended upon them they would be wise to have made all preparations in their power, in order to increase the chances for successful resistance.

Provisions were secured to the raft, as was also a keg of water. Teddy, being something of a sportsman in his way, fished out his gun from the battered little cruiser, and made out to lash the same upon their projected float, since he declared there could be no telling what necessities might arise, when such a weapon would come in handy. On his part Maro thought more of a hatchet he had found, and which he declared would prove of greater value should they live to reach some island shore. The day was slipping away, and already had the sun been blotted

out of sight by those ugly clouds that gave promise of severe weather.

Teddy had found an old marine glass in the cabin, and with this he swept the horizon. Suddenly he announced a discovery, handing the glass to his companion for his opinion.

Maro also made out the speck seen under the black cloud belt to be land, probably one of those sand-keys so numerous in that section; for they had come to the conclusion that the northerly storm must have carried them far to the south, so that they were now somewhere about the Bahamas.

The second storm did not prove a severe one, and the old vessel held on tenaciously so that another dawn found them still aboard, drifting rapidly southeast, with nothing in sight all around. Day followed day with many little alarms; but it seemed as though some especial Providence must be watching over the two lads, since the water-logged schooner continued to float, even though settling gradually nearer the

surface of the sea. Several times they had sighted other vessels in the distance, but the wreck lay so low, and, being without a sign of a mast, managed to escape observation, so that their frantic signals were useless.

It looked as though they might be picked up, if at all, far beyond the new territory of the United States, Porto Rico; for according to the crude efforts of Maro to find their latitude and longitude with what instruments the captain had abandoned when he fled, the schooner had covered many hundreds of miles in her long drift before the prevailing northwest winds, so that they were now on the borders of that mystic sea of romance and history known as the Caribbean, named after a tribe of savages once inhabiting the numerous islands dotting its blue surface. Thus the time came when the long expected happened.

It was not in a storm, as they had frequently anticipated, that they were compelled to abandon the schooner, for the day was bright and ex-

ceedingly hot, with but a catspaw dimpling the listless surface of the heavy ocean.

Teddy made the discovery that a change was taking place. "Water's making fast, and I think the end is near," was the way he put it to his companion. Investigation proved what he said to be the truth, for some new break must have occurred, allowing an inflow of the sea; so it was decided their best policy would be to get the raft over the side as speedily as possible, in order to be ready for emergencies.

These lads were wise for their years; but there is nothing more likely to bring about such a condition than responsibility; and they had no older head to advise them now.

All had been arranged with block and tackle, so that a little hard labor accomplished what they desired. Some more things were hastily thrown upon the raft, and then, as the signs of the doomed schooner going down began to be painfully evident, they jumped overboard and paddled some distance off. When the final

moment came, and with a strange sound not unlike a sob the old vessel sank out of sight, Teddy felt a lump in his throat, and neither could speak a single word for some little time.

CHAPTER III.

MAROONED FOR A CERTAINTY.

Teddy still clung to the marine glass as though in it he recognized a faithful friend that might sooner or later be of value to them.

For a brief time they sat there gaping at the spot where the vessel had gone down, marked with only a mass of bubbles that gradually vanished until nothing was left to tell the tale beyond some scattered bits of loose timber that came to the surface buoyantly, and continued to float.

“Well, she’s gone, sure enough. Guess we didn’t get away any too soon to avoid a ducking,” remarked Maro, trying to look cheerful.

“It would have been more serious than that, I’m afraid,” said Teddy, who knew the fierce

suction brought into play when a ship is drawn beneath the waves.

“We look more like a speck on the water than ever,” ventured the lad from New England.

“Still, we’re all right yet, and my motto is never to give up so long as you’ve got a bit of breath left. Others have been in worse situations than this, and lived to tell the story. We must do our level best to pull through, and nobody can do more.” So they talked cheerfully, and believed it a duty to look on the brightest side of the trouble, though many would have considered that there was little encouragement about their prospects.

Since they were now about on a level with the water, observations could not be expected to bring about such good results as when on the deck of a vessel, or clinging to her crosstrees; nevertheless, Teddy made frequent use of his glass, and about an hour before sunset discovered another of those islets so characteristic of the tropics. It was far away, but the drift of their course seemed to be in that quarter, and

consequently both of them were pleased to see unmistakable evidence that the island had trees upon it, since the setting sun glistened from the shiny green foliage, possibly of cocoanuts or the still more common palmetto, with its green leaves. Thus the night set in.

It was dark and gloomy, for clouds had come hurrying athwart the fair sky, and the young moon was obliterated. It seemed cruel that they should be threatened with another blow just at this critical stage of their adventure, when there was at least a chance to land upon a friendly shore. Then the wind began to rise, and waves splashed over the raft. The boys were soon wet through, but this caused them no inconvenience, with such a grim prospect for more serious things staring them in the face.

Familiarity with danger may lessen its terrors somewhat, but surely no healthy young mind can face death without more or less terror; and what with the howling wind, the tossing sea and the extreme difficulty which they experienced in maintaining their hold on the now

shifting raft, the boys could be excused for feeling scared. At the same time they kept their heads about them, and tried to cheer each other up by occasional words of comfort, shouted almost at the top of their voices.

How long could the raft hold out? That seemed to be the leading and most important question, for the spars had only been secured with ropes, and these lashings must be chafed by the constant rubbing and grinding, until finally eaten through they would allow the various timbers to be torn asunder. When that occurred our lads must expect to find themselves struggling in the angry sea, with their chances considerably reduced.

Among other things which they had secured from the wreck of the *Nancy Lee* had been a number of life preservers, which, though rather the worse for wear and age, might still prove of benefit in a struggle for existence in the flood of waters. They had well fastened several of these to their persons, and hoped to benefit from the same should the worst come upon them.

How long their suspense lasted neither ever knew. It might have been hours, judging from the strain which racked them, body and mind.

Maro knew the raft was beginning to go to pieces, and feared that the dreaded moment must be close at hand when they would no longer be able to keep each other company, but torn apart would have to fight for existence against the fury of the monster that sought new victims.

It seemed as though the clamor of the storm had doubled during the last few minutes, and yet Maro did not see how that could be. Suddenly he became aware of a familiar pounding sound amid the throbbing noises around them, which he believed could only be caused by the billows beating a sandy stretch of shore. Then they must have been driven close to the island, which had been sighted before night closed in upon them.

Oh, if they could only manage to get out of this mad swirl of waters, and feel the solid ground beneath their feet! Just then such a

thing appeared to be the greatest luxury in the world. He tried to communicate with his chum, and while unable to catch what Teddy shouted back, believed the other must have divined what he meant.

It was fortunate such a crisis came before they were too exhausted to make a fight for it. When a billow that was more strenuous than any preceding it had torn the raft asunder and allowed them to cling to a single spar, they began to strike out in a puny fashion for the shore. At least it appeared puny when contrasted with the fierce energy of the storm demon against which they pitted their efforts.

Several times Teddy feared the end, when swallowed in a smother of yeasty foam he felt the spar being almost torn from his rapidly weakening clutch; but Young Canada had a tenacious desire to remain in the land of the living, and he renewed his hold as well as conditions allowed.

It was with a thrill of gratitude that he felt his feet strike the bottom, although the next in-

stant he found himself swimming again, buoyed up more or less by the cork life-preservers under his arms. Again this same thing happened, and it seemed to Teddy that they were now in water even more shallow than before, a fact of tremendous significance, since it meant that they were being surely pushed ashore. And his companion had by this time guessed the same thing, as a shout announced during a temporary lull in the turmoil.

By a united effort they managed to gain a footing the next time there was a recurrence of the sand-touching phenomenon, and even staggered forward a few paces before being caught up by a rushing inflow of salty water. One thing helped them. Both lads had known considerable of life on the ocean, and were well acquainted with such little tricks to cheat the grasping suck of the tide as are common among shore dwellers of the coast, though familiarity never breeds contempt for the mighty monster abiding in the sea. Finally a mighty effort emancipated them from the clinging grasp of

the water, and they staggered out of the deep, much like drunken men. Never mind, it seemed good enough to know that they had found a refuge amid all this wild confusion.

Nothing could possibly be done while the darkness lasted, so they moved off inland a bit, and finding shelter behind a hummock, tried to talk the situation over, though the noise of the pounding billows, together with the rush of the wind, made talking an effort. Pretty soon Teddy found his lips quivering, for what with their soaking, together with the violent efforts put forth, the wind felt actually cold.

A fire promised relief, if only one could be started. Teddy declared he had matches in a waterproof safe in his pocket, an announcement that his friend greeted with delight. Together they set about finding material for a blaze.

This is never lacking where palmettoes grow, since the dead stalks and leaves offer fine tinder, ready to flash into a blaze at the scratch of a lucifer. So it was that presently a flame shot into the air, just around the point of land where

a little cove seemed to set in, and once the fire had been started both lads busied themselves in accumulating a sufficient supply of material to keep it going. Ah! this was something like, and if all shipwrecked mariners could fare as sumptuously there would be little cause for complaint. In this manner did they put in the night.

While one slept the other stood guard, not that they anticipated the presence of any dangerous beasts on the sand island, but simply because they were nervous and thought it best to be on the safe side.

That was a night neither would ever forget as long as they lived. It seemed to be never ending; and the storm, while short-lived, was a howler so long as it kept up.

It was while Teddy stood guard that the dawn came. Long before the clouds had parted and allowed the silvery stars a chance to look down upon the rough camp of the two castaways, so when the east began to redden Teddy knew the

sun must soon appear to brighten things up and give them good cheer.

He hurried down to the water's edge in the hope that some of the things they had upon the raft might have been flung on the shore; and finding that this was indeed the case he busied himself in dragging such articles out of reach of the rising tide. While thus occupied he was joined by his fellow prisoner, who also entered into the business with a zest.

Some of the food was so water-soaked as to be utterly worthless, but other portions had not been injured, so that starvation did not immediately stare them in the face, at any rate. Having eaten, their next thought was in connection with the island upon which they had been so providentially cast, and which might be their home for many moons. It became an object with them to explore their domain, in order to ascertain its dimensions.

Teddy was uneasy, for he understood that there were times when the dreaded West India hurricane originating around the Leeward Is-

lands, in its fury devastated Porto Rico. At such times small sand-keys were utterly overwhelmed and blotted out of sight, to reappear again perhaps at a later period of calm. Of course the presence of trees gave them reason to hope that the bit of land upon which they had found refuge might not be in this floating class, though there could be no telling when its day might come.

These vague fears were soon laid at rest, for their territory appeared so spacious, and the disturbed sea was so rapidly becoming quiet again, that it seemed ridiculous to suspect evil from such a tame source. How easy it is in the midst of peace to forget war's alarms!

The trees were clustered about the northwest end of the island, as though this region might be reckoned least liable to inundation, a fact that gave them the idea of making their camp in the same quarter. Transporting their lumber and other things of value took up the greater portion of the morning, so that it was rather late in the day when they set to work building a shelter.

CHAPTER IV.

DRAWING RATIONS FROM THE SEA.

When night began to close in around them the prisoners of the sand-key were tired out, and hungry as Tartars, so that very naturally their thoughts turned in the direction of supper. The fire had not been allowed to die out completely, since their supply of matches was extremely limited. A small amount of blowing and judicious coaxing served to start it into a bright flame, and presently the odor of cooking spread over the strip of shore, possibly for the first time since the islet was fashioned by the throes of Nature, during some equinoctial hurricane in the past. The wonderful air-tight qualities of those screw-top canisters belonging to Teddy's camp-chest had preserved the contents from salt water, and thus they were enabled to

enjoy the luxury of a pannikin of tea, together with a stew fashioned out of corned beef and some succotash, which, with some ship biscuits, a little the worse for their salt bath, combined to make a feast for the hungry workers.

The shelter was also a comfort, since it would shield the sleepers from the heavy dews so apt to saturate everything under the bare sky in this region of the semi-tropics. Besides, in case of rain it would come in very handy, though not of sufficient stability to resist a storm of extreme violence.

Long the two friends talked around the blaze of their campfire, and many schemes were broached, looking to their ultimate release from the lone isle. Some of the ideas advanced on the spur of the moment were doubtless not only eccentric but absurd, yet on the other hand germs of good common sense abounded in others which in due time might prove to be the foundation for a successful move.

One thing gave Teddy considerable satisfaction. Just before the sun had sunk out of sight

beyond that monotonous line of watery horizon he had had his attention attracted toward some object bobbing up and down in the water a little way down the western shore of the island, and, upon hurrying thither, what was his delight to find that it was his sturdy little cruiser trying to make a landing. Those air-tight compartments had buoyed up the damaged boat despite the violence of the seas that pounded at her frail sides; and thinking that there must be something especially providential in this Teddy had halloed until his companion came running in hot haste, looking somewhat alarmed, as though fearing lest trouble had cropped up.

Maro may not have felt the same peculiar affection for the mosquito craft that filled the breast of the young Canuck, for Teddy had spent many comfortable weeks cruising in the *Loon*; but he could in a measure catch some of the enthusiasm which caused his chum to consider the eventual repairing of the craft, and a future voyage in her to some inhabited island of the Caribbean. Accordingly, they set to

work to drag the almost wholly submerged cedar boat from the water, a task by no means easy, especially after their hard work of the day. It was accomplished at last, however, and a rope attached to one of the palmettoes insured its safety until such time as they could work it still further above the line of high tide. Finally they lay down to sleep.

It was a strange situation for two young chaps yet under eighteen, but then both were accustomed to camp life, and as for Teddy, he had not slept under a genuine roof these last two months, so that on the whole they were in a condition to make the best of matters, and feel grateful that their lives had been spared.

Several times Maro awakened, and, having a little nervous feeling connected with the condition of affairs, after the strain of his narrow escape on board the schooner, he crawled outside to take an observation connected with the weather. The stars shone brightly in the dark blue heavens, the breeze came in softly over the swelling sea, bringing with it the odors so well

beloved by those who worship at the shrine of salty water, and not a sign of trouble rewarded his vigil, so that he again sought his slumber couch, to rest in contentment until another dream of turmoil and wreck caused him to sit up suddenly and listen. So the night wore away, and the dawn came along.

There were to be no sluggards on Stevenson Island, and accordingly both lads were astir at the first peep of day, the fire was renewed, and Maro prepared breakfast, while Teddy, eager to ascertain just what the damage to the *Loon* might amount to, set to work making a thorough examination of her sides.

While the boat was not so broken as to be beyond repair under ordinary conditions, where the mechanic had control of tools and material with which to work, it would have seemed a hopeless task to most boys who were in Teddy's place. He happened to possess an astonishing amount of persistence, and was also inclined to look on the bright side of things. No matter what happened it might have been much worse;

and he believed that given time he could even mend the *Loon* so as to make her nearly as seaworthy as when he sailed her down old Champlain and through Lake George to the Hudson.

There was no lack of things to do. Indeed, the puzzle seemed to be how to find time to attempt all of them. Maro chanced to be a lover of system, and with the ready consent of his comrade he jotted down in order the various tasks that seemed most necessary, so that valuable time might not be wasted in wandering from one to another.

Two of the stoutest spars were lashed firmly together, and to the top of this pole a signal was secured, after which the mast was planted in the sand at such a point where the waving flag might, according to their ideas, best be noticed by any chance passing vessel. This is the first duty of shipwrecked mariners, according to all accounts from De Foe down to modern times.

Just how long their stay on the island might turn out to be, was a question neither could answer. If it should be beyond reasonable limits

they would find themselves hard put to provide suitable provisions, since their visible supply did not amount to a great deal, and as yet they had run across no convenient wreck from which all manner of good things might be secured. That might come in time; it usually does in all stories connected with Crusoe life; but they would do well not to count on such a bonanza.

Maro rigged several fish-lines, the material being found in that compartment of the little cruising boat where the Canadian boy had kept his odds and ends. A suitable spot was found and set-lines thrown out, in the hope of a strike that might give them fish for dinner. Then they started to work. Teddy cleaning his gun, which had come ashore when he did, while the other lad searched the beach for anything of value that might have been washed up during the night.

How many times during the hours marking that first day on the lonely sand-key did their wistful eyes search the horizon in the hopes of sighting some manner of sail, or the black smoke

of a passing steamer bound from South or Central American ports to New York, but disappointment rewarded all these eager observations; for while the daylight lasted not a speck appeared upon the sky-line, though several times a passing bird far out at sea, or the antics of some porpoises among the rollers, where they seemed to come in contact with the falling sky, gave either of the lads a sudden thrill. They would get accustomed to these things in time, for many grievous disappointments were to make their hearts sick.

Looking back over the day, they could congratulate themselves on numerous things done, or at least started, and their weariness when nightfall descended attested to the vigor with which they had labored.

The fishing had been productive of results, though Teddy had to watch the lines if they were to reap any reward from their enterprise. When they examined the lines at noon the bait was gone from one, while attached to the other was a large fish-head, showing that a prisoner



HE HAD THE SATISFACTION OF DRAGGING A PRIZE FROM THE SEA.
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had been taken and then appropriated by some hungry shark.

Teddy thought he would inspect the line more frequently, and seeing some commotion later on he drew in, this time saving about a third of a fish, the balance having been snapped off as clean as a whistle by rapacious teeth. It did not look promising, but Teddy immediately re-baited the hook. His confidence was not misplaced, for he presently had the satisfaction of dragging a silvery prize from the sea, though only for his deftness it too would have gone the way of the others, for he plainly saw the dorsal fin of a shark follow the captive some little distance toward shore.

Enough was as good as a feast, and having prepared the fish for supper he returned to his allotted task. Perhaps the cookery was not altogether carried out according to the most scientific principles known to modern kitchens, but it satisfied the longings of two hungry and not overly particular boys to a dot, and when they

had eaten until the point of satiety was reached the supper was declared a huge success.

Things were much more comfortable on this the second night of their stay on the island, since Maro had been tinkering around at odd times during the day, improving the sleeping accommodations and putting things to rights after his ideas of ship-shape housekeeping.

Teddy, while methodical in some things, was a genuine boy when it came to leaving articles around after he had used them; and in a playful spirit he nicknamed his companion the Old Maid, at which Maro only smiled, for the title had, be it said, been bestowed upon him frequently in the past, and, besides, there was only affection in the way the Canadian uttered it.

One discovery Maro made while prowling along the shore. He had noticed certain marks in the sand that looked as though some heavy body had been dragged up the beach, and the signs of claws gave him a pointer that solved the mystery. Why, of course it had been a turtle. This was not the season for the laying of

eggs, spring being the usual time; but then it is possible to find isolated cases of nesting at any time of year, for there is no real winter in the Caribbean.

Saying nothing to Teddy, wishing to give him a surprise if all turned out well, he crept from the shelter, leaving his companion fast asleep. The moon still hung trembling above the horizon, and gave a certain amount of light, so that with a stout stick in his hand Maro walked in the direction of the spot where he had seen the tracks. He knew enough about the habits of the creatures to understand that if the process of egg-laying was not completed in one night it would be resumed on the next, and he entertained high hopes that some good fortune would bring him success. As he drew near the spot he strained his eyes to discover anything that would indicate the presence of a loggerhead upon the beach, and seeing something moving toward the water he gave a shout and rushed to the attack.

CHAPTER V.

A STORM, AND A SAIL.

Teddy was aroused by the shout, and came tumbling out, filled with wonder, for he could not comprehend what manner of trouble had come to pass to bring about such a night alarm. Maro could be heard up the beach, calling him to be quick or it would get away; and while this failed to illuminate the mystery, it at least brought Teddy to his senses, for he only stopped to snatch up his gun, and then set out on a bee-line for the scene of the disturbance.

He found a very busy young man when he arrived, for Maro was doing everything he knew how to keep the turtle from reaching water. In some manner, after failing to turn the creature over on its back, as he understood was the style of those who professionally hunted turtles for

the market, he had managed to secure a hold on one of its hind flippers, and bracing himself in the yielding sand as best the opportunity allowed, he tugged right manfully to hold his own.

The turtle had the best in the contest. It was a case of four legs against two, and the sharp toe-nails of the creature gave it a great advantage, since Maro continued to slip on the sand. Despite his strenuous resistance the lad was slowly but surely being dragged nearer the edge of the sea, and left alone he soon must have admitted himself beaten or else gone adrift with his persistent adversary, which would hardly have been a paying investment.

Teddy joined in the game with enthusiasm, for he had heard much with regard to the delightful qualities of turtle soup, and was anxious to try the same. While Maro tugged with renewed zeal he took a hand by poking a lever under the turtle and with a scientific thrust endeavoring to turn the creature on its back. Several failures did not daunt the young marooner, and finally he gave a shout of delight as the

wildly waving flippers clawed the air and the feat was accomplished.

When they had rested a bit the boys set to work dragging their captive further up the beach, and anchoring the same by a rope that was fastened around one leg; for they could not quite convince themselves that in some mysterious way the creature might not yet manage to right itself again while they slept. Well, the palmetto was not so easy to drag as Maro had been, and there seemed to be a fair chance that they might find the turtle safe when morning arrived.

Nor was this all. They set about discovering where the treasure-trove lay, and as the trail stood out plainly it was not a difficult task to follow the same to the nest.

Burrowing into the soft sand which had been flattened down by the female turtle after her eggs were deposited, Maro began to toss out such an accumulation of soft-shelled things that his companion ran to the "barracks" for some sort of a receptacle in which to hold them. This

was a decided windfall, and promised them many a treat in the line of food, since omelets could be made without number.

All fears of starvation might be set at rest, for no matter how long they were doomed to remain on the island it seemed possible to always draw upon the wonderful resources of the sea in order to secure an abundance of supplies. Why, they began to actually enjoy the situation, if only some assurance might be had that in good season they would be rescued before a hurricane swept across the Caribbean that would threaten to engulf their little oasis in the desert of waters. Really, it hardly seemed possible that any one could remain upon an island in this region for any great length of time undiscovered and left to his own devices; and yet their refuge was but such a minute affair that it might not be visited once in ten years.

The next day was another busy one. Maro attended to Madame Turtle, and with infinite trouble managed to get her shell off, though the task of cutting up the jerking flesh was one he

never hankered after again. No one who has never carved a turtle can imagine the sensation brought about by the muscular contractions of the flesh even hours after death has apparently come to the creature. But it was worth all the trouble, and both boys united in declaring the stew a feast fit for a king.

There were some clouds in the sky when the sun went down again, and Maro eyed them reflectively, after the manner of one who had been in constant touch with sailors all his life. It was about time for another turn in the weather, and they must prepare themselves as best they could for whatever came. It arrived all right, and with a boom that rather startled the boys.

Possibly it was an hour or so after midnight that there was a sudden roar of thunder in the air, and the rude shelter shook with the rush of wind. The sounds that greeted them might have brought dismay to even bolder hearts than theirs, for the shrieking winds passing through the palmetto tops made a fearful noise, which was added to by the dash of increasing waves

upon the shore, and the boom of thunder. Flashes of lightning followed in almost constant succession, so they could not at least complain of being unable to see.

How satisfactory it was to remember that they had fastened the little shelter to the trees with additional ropes, so that it seemed as though it could only be carried away by a blast of such violence as might tear a palmetto tree from its foundations. That proved how it paid to take precautions, for had they left anything outside it would have been swept into the sea by the rush of wind.

Plainly there could be no more sleep that night. Nor was it of any use going outside to be soaked with the deluge of rain. Several times both sprang to their feet in alarm when some fierce gust made the shelter quiver and act as though about to leave them to the fury of the gale, with no protection overhead. But finally, as the hour of dawn drew nearer, the storm abated.

Early Maro went forth to see what the effect

of the storm had been. He found that the shore line was altered, as doubtless might be expected after each and every storm of consequence, but there did not appear to be much material damage done. A few things had been lost, among others the shell of the turtle, which Maro had intended to scrape later on and in some way utilize as a receptacle. Teddy suggested that it would make an admirable bath-tub, but with the whole ocean in which to dip the idea had not struck the New England boy with any force, and now the question had been solved for them in another manner.

Of course he scanned the horizon for a sail, and used the old marine glass which had followed his fortunes since deserted on the wreck by that rascally mariner Captain Clawson. This time he found what he sought, and called his companion.

There was a white speck on the horizon which could not be anything but a vessel booming along before the fresh breeze that followed the storm; but that did not mean they were to be

rescued. It was only one chance in twenty the course of the schooner would bring her close enough to the sand-key so that her lookout might discover the signal of distress flying from the pole, and which had stood the gale splendidly.

Breakfast was prepared under difficulties, for every few minutes both boys wished to take a squint through the glass in hopes that the white spot might be growing apace; but alas and alack! they finally found themselves forced to admit that it became beautifully less, showing that the boat must be leaving them, she having passed the island some two hours before day-break. Although disappointed, the boys saw much in the incident to encourage them. It looked as though they were not entirely out of the beaten track of vessels trading between the two Americas, and they might with reason hope to see another vessel at any time.

Much awaited their attention on this day. An hour or so was spent in repairing the ravages of the storm on their habitation, and then while Teddy devoted his attention to the job of start-

ing repairs on the little boat, Maro took up other tasks of various kinds. He caught another fish, and was in turn almost dragged into the sea by a vigorous shark, as he supposed, or some immense creature that became involved in a dispute with the stout hook at the end of the line, and which our pertinacious young friend endeavored to pull ashore. Fortunately he had been wise enough to drive a stake in the sand near the water's edge, which he denominated his "snubbing-post," and by taking a few quick turns around this with the bight of the cord ere the captive could drag him into the water, he managed to stay the vigorous first rush of the fish.

When Teddy came to his assistance they were enabled to drag the unwilling prisoner ashore. It was not a shark, but a gigantic fish shaped after the pattern of a monster sea-bass. Neither of them knew to a certainty, but Maro said he had read about a certain jew-fish that was caught along the Florida coast weighing up to four hundred pounds, and this seemed to answer

the description to a dot. Anyhow, they chopped a big cube out of the side and boiled it in a tin kettle, both pronouncing it splendid eating, and only a little inferior to fresh halibut, which it closely resembled, though somewhat coarser in fiber.

Really, it was fun to be thrown upon their own resources in this way, as any intelligent American boy must admit, especially if he possess the element of being able to take care of himself, such as seemed to be a part of our friends' natures. So several more days glided by. Indeed, it was a mystery where the time did go, the boys found so many duties which had to be attended to.

They had now been on the island a week, and were beginning to feel like old settlers. They had given a name to every little cove and point, and in order to remember how things looked when, at a future day they might talk of their strange experience in the romantic Caribbean, Maro even went to the trouble of drawing an elaborate map of the island upon which he in-

scribed all the queer names bestowed upon its various sections, and which were for the most part supplied by Teddy from memories he held of various characters in Dickens, his favorite writer.

Thus they had their camp on Dickens' Island, in David Copperfield grove; the habitation itself was known as Bleak House; a point near by, having a zigzag appearance, flourished under the significant name of Oliver Twist Cape, and so it went on, sometimes with more or less humorous effect as the idea struck the Canadian lad.

CHAPTER VI.

WRECKED ON A LEE SHORE.

Teddy was making fair progress on the repairs of the *Loon*, though it did prove to be hard work, considering the fact that he had so few proper tools with which to accomplish the task, and the material for repairs was so limited. He felt fairly encouraged with his enterprise, and promised that, when a certain time had elapsed, he would have the cedar boat ready for their voyage to some other island, where they might hope to find some of their kind, and eventually board a vessel.

Teddy knew his Robinson thoroughly, and was able to surprise his companion in various ways, very often agreeably. Of course there was no need of their attempting many of the things which that famous Crusoe accomplished,

since their stay on the sand-key was not likely to be of great duration; and, besides, they did not have the material for making pots, nor were there wild goats to capture or tame.

Possibly it might be up to them sooner or later to defend themselves, not against cannibals, but some of the lawless spirits that roam these semi-tropical seas in search of plunder, ready to rob a planter, or pillage a wreck wherever it might be found. A story of the Caribbean Sea would hardly be complete without the introduction of such elements, for they certainly abound in that home of the old-time buccanier, almost as cruel and crafty as the chaps who cruised in search of those famous silver laden ships of the Spanish Main, of which history has so much to say.

Maro knew this, for had he not heard many weird tales told around the galley-fire on board some fishing boat lying on the Grand Banks one season, related by grizzled old salts who had voyaged many a time to South American ports ere turning fishermen? Thus by degrees he

caused the young Canadian to feel more or less uneasiness concerning these things, and fall to speculating whether or not it would be to their advantage to have a vessel anchor off the island, seeing that the chances of their being roughly handled seemed so very strong.

Although they had kept a bright lookout for another bit of luck, they had failed to discover a second turtle ashore, so that only the fond memory of those delicious steaks remained to haunt them, since the storm had carried the balance of their stock of meat adrift. With some self-raising flour which he had in one of the tin cannisters, practical camper Teddy fashioned some glorious flapjacks, which he cooked in approved manner over the fire, even giving each the traditional toss in the air when ready to turn it over, which wonderful operation no doubt accounts for the name of the toothsome morsel. And Maro vowed he had never in all his life partaken of a feast so delightful as those cakes when sprinkled with a little sugar.

We all look back to certain occasions when fe-

rocious appetite makes us imagine we are feasting on nectar of the gods, though under other circumstances we might turn up our noses in disgust at the identical bill of fare. Let us be thankful then that there are such oases in our lives when we are ready to accept small favors with full hearts.

They drank their coffee without milk or sugar and reckoned it ambrosia, though Maro had never been able to bring himself to like it this way in his comfortable home.

The sun became so hot about the middle of the day that they were glad to knock off work and lie around under the shade of the trees, where the ocean breeze cooled their fevered brows; but a few hours spent in recuperating their wasted energies could be easily made up in the early morning or while the moon held high carnival, for it was now drawing near its full stage, and rose just before the red orb of day plunged behind the watery horizon in the west.

Many things had been carried out, looking

toward their added comfort; and still Maro found his list of jobs to be done growing longer all the while, so it did not appear as though he would lack for work, should their enforced stay on the isle run far into the weeks. When indications pointed toward another spell of bad weather they were in a position to face it with less fear of results than on the other occasion.

Toward evening one day black clouds began to sweep up from the storm quarter, and presented such a wonderful appearance that the boys knocked off work in order to watch the advance of the outriders.

The dark masses rolling in battalions looked for all the world like cavalry charging into the mouth of cannon that spurted out fire and smoke as the lightnings flashed, while the deep-toned thunder added to the picturesque deception. It thrilled them with its magnificence, and both declared they could not remember ever having witnessed such a grand spectacle in more northern climes. By mere chance Teddy cast his weather eye over the ocean, possibly because he

thought to see how the water might look with the angry glow of the lightning reflected from its dark and forbidding surface.

“See!” he exclaimed, suddenly, “a sail, a sail, and bearing down on the island hand over fist!” And in plain sight could be seen the white sail of a small boat which flew before the increasing wind like a frightened bird.

“Can they make a harbor?” asked Maro anxiously, for it began to look as though human lives might be placed in jeopardy when the storm in all its fury broke.

“It’s an even chance. If the blast will only hold off ten minutes longer perhaps they can run in; but I fear the chances are against them. We must be on the watch to do what little we can if the worst comes to pass,” declared Teddy.

Perhaps those on board were wreckers, or lawless spongers who would not hesitate to rob them of their little possessions; but to the credit of the boys be it said, they never gave this matter a moment’s thought, only remembering that

danger hung over the heads of those who were their fellows, and that perhaps it might be their privilege to render some assistance. That was where they proved the manly spirit animating their lives.

It was a time of considerable anxiety to the lads, and they watched the progress of the little craft with an interest that manifested itself in bated breath and trembling hands.

“There she comes!” cried Maro suddenly, pointing out to where a smother of white foam told how the squall was rushing down with the speed of a race-horse upon the vessel. There came a tremendous blast of thunder just then, and as though this reverberating crash had burst the reservoirs of the low-hanging clouds the rain swooped down in a perfect torrent, and like magic the whole scene was wiped out of sight, so that only a wall of descending water greeted their strained vision.

The boys were so overcome with concern for the safety of those on board the vessel that they gave little heed to the fact that they had already

become soaked to the skin. That was a mighty small matter as compared with the uncertainty hanging over the fate of those who were out yonder in all that turmoil of raging waters, the sport of a tropical storm. So they gave up all thoughts of supper, and standing as close to the tumbling waters as they dared, strove to pierce that veil spread out before them so tantalizingly.

Once or twice Teddy thought he caught sounds that resembled shouts or screams; but the roar of the wind through the palmettoes, together with the deafening crash of the great waves on the sandy beach, made a combination that created all manner of weird noises, and it seemed an utter impossibility for the voice of a struggling sailor to be heard amid the din.

"This is awful," said Teddy in his friend's ear, as they hung side by side and kept vigil, hoping to be of some use should any one of the vessel's crew survive the shock and be washed ashore.

"I'm afraid they've all been drowned," de-

clared Teddy finally, as time passed and they neither saw nor heard anything more.

The conditions had improved in various ways, ting much lighter. Perhaps that will help us some. We must go along the shore and keep a good lookout. I've known of many a poor fellow being washed up on the sand, and too weak to help himself, carried back to sea by another wave larger than the first," said Maro.

"It's hard luck all around, both for those poor chaps as well as ourselves, eh, mate?" remarked Teddy.

"But I guess we've got the best of it. Anyhow, I wouldn't like to change places with them just now. Let's move along and see if anything has come ashore."

The conditions had improved in various ways, for the worst of the blow seemed to have passed; while the moon behind the clouds served to dissipate the awful blackness that had for a brief time hung over the scene of the tragedy. That the small craft had surely been wrecked neither doubted for a moment, for it seemed beyond all

reason that anything could have lived through such a fierce experience, especially when close upon a lee shore.

It was Teddy who made the first discovery and immediately they found themselves stooping over some object that lay spread out on the beach. It was a man beyond any question, and at first glance they feared he must be beyond all hope, for he had all the appearance of one drowned.

Maro had assisted many times in restoring to life some unfortunate who had been the sport of the waves, and he knew just how to go about it in order to preserve the vital spark, if so be it still remained in the body. He whipped the man over on his chest in a certain position, and set Teddy to work pumping his arms with a motion calculated to start the action of his almost exhausted heart. Success attended his efforts, for after a little the other groaned and showed unmistakable signs of coming to, which gave Teddy reason to increase his efforts, feeling that they were not being wasted.

When the man had so far recovered as to be out of danger, the two boys helped him to a position where he could rest his back against one of the palmettoes. Maro questioned him with regard to his companions, but he was in no condition to talk, and could only mutter faintly that there had been five of them on board the sloop when she struck, and that his fellows had been cast into the sea at the same time as himself. So our boys started out to patrol the beach, hoping that some good fortune might enable them to save others of the ill-fated crew.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PIRATICAL ANTONIO.

Although the boys walked completely around the little island several times, they discovered no signs of other unfortunates, so it seemed reasonable to believe that the companions of the man they had saved must have been swept into the mighty maw of the ocean, and were drowned long before this time.

As it seemed folly to continue the search, they returned to the place where they had left the resuscitated chap. He was standing up as though his strength had almost in full measure returned during their absence, showing that he could not have received serious injury, though his chances would have been slim indeed had not the young marooners come upon him when they did. Perhaps he understood how much he owed

them; but if so, he was a man not given to many words, for he certainly made no mention of the fact that he felt under obligations to them.

As near as Maro could make out he appeared to be a pretty tough character, and as he spoke, they knew he had Spanish blood in his veins, or perhaps it was Portuguese; but all the same he was fond of ripping out fierce exclamations that had a distinct flavor of the piratical order. They also discovered that he wore a sash around his waist in the approved manner of those buccaneers made famous through history and tradition.

Maro had never run across any of these blood-thirsty villains in his few cruises, but he had watched their antics on the stage as depicted in the comic opera of the "Pirates of Penzance," and felt positive he could not be mistaken in the breed.

Well, they were two against one, and, besides, it did not appear that Antonio, as he gave his name, could be armed with anything beyond a sheath-knife which he carried in his sash, while

they had the gun, a hatchet and a knife apiece. Then, again, it would seem as though the fellow could hardly be wholly insensible to the fact that these lads had saved his miserable life, and surely he ought to have a grain of gratitude in his make-up for his preservers, even if he failed to manifest the same by means of outward expressions.

They took him to the camp. Antonio was duly impressed with the variety of their possessions, nor did Maro wholly like the manner in which his black eyes shot around from one object to another, just as though the question might have flashed up in his mind as to whether in the pile of plunder there might not be some treasure-trove. These Spanish-American vagabonds of the Caribbean are ever dreaming of striking it rich some fine day, since they have from infancy heard the most stupendous lies about Captain Kidd, Blackbeard and their tribe, secreting fabulous amounts of treasure, and in fact, come to believe every fairy tale as gospel truth.

Fortunately, they had the means for making a fire, keeping a supply of dry wood under shelter all the while in anticipation of just such an emergency as this.

Teddy started a pot of coffee, though their supply had reached a low ebb by this time, and every thimbleful seemed very precious, but all of them were in need of some stimulant after the strain they had gone through.

The rescued man eyed these preparations with satisfaction, and as the odor of the boiling beans began to permeate the atmosphere of the little shelter he sniffed the air hungrily, while his eyes lighted up with a satisfaction too great for words. Plainly he was not disposed to say anything unless well pumped, and this circumstance did not impress the boys in his favor, since it seemed to them that the right kind of a fellow should have been bubbling over with gratitude toward those who had served him as they had done, and were still doing.

It was still raining, but the violence of the storm was gone, and no doubt the clouds would

presently break, allowing the moon to show herself in all her glory.

Maro had busied himself about the fire, cooking some fish which he had caught that day, using as bait the curious little fiddler crabs that scurried in legions along portions of the beach, and which were, as he expressed it, just "pie" to the sheepshead hanging around some rocky spots along the southern end of the island, which rocks were of course of the coquina species, fashioned by minute insects, much as coral is formed under the water.

They fell to and made a meal. The pirate, as Teddy persisted in calling their guest, had his appetite with him all right, and it evidently had not been impaired by his submersion in the briny deep, for he ate with such a vim that the boys realized their stay on the island would have to be of less duration than they had hitherto counted on, if they hoped to keep variety on their table.

When the meal had been finished the fellow pulled out a highly-scented black pipe, and

loaded it with some wet tobacco that gave out a most terrible odor. Of course the boys could not say anything just then; but they were resolved that if his supply of this villainous weed held out, he would have to enjoy its fumes by himself on the outside of the shelter after this.

It was now time they learned something about the rescued sailor, and accordingly both began to fire questions at him. He answered very cautiously, Maro thought, while Teddy was of the opinion he did not fully understand what they asked, which would account for the slowness of his replies, and their seeming lack of candor.

Just as they had supposed, he admitted that he was something of a general utility man, by turns wrecker, sponger, turtler, and always a treasure-seeker. His boat had come to this region in order to pick up a load of curios and shells to be disposed of at Palm Beach in Florida, to the hordes of rich Yankee tourists frequenting that place while the cold winter held sway up North.

Five besides himself constituted the crew, including the captain, whom he called Vasco Da Gama, a name that struck Maro as having some connection with history; and he wondered whether this modern knight could have possessed many of the same qualities that made the other famous in his day.

Antonio gave it as his opinion that perhaps his comrades might have been swept past the island at the time he was cast up on the shore; but he did not believe they had been drowned. Perhaps he considered them too tough to be easily put out of the way. But one thing or another, he did not seem to bother his head much about their fate, being wholly concerned with regard to his own condition, and the various things that puzzled him with regard to the presence of these two greenhorns on this lone key of the great Caribbean Sea.

From time to time Maro noticed him start and look around eagerly, and he believed the fellow must have a load upon his mind. Indeed, his appearance was the acme of mystery.

and both felt sure he must have figured in many a dark deed during his career. They wished he, too, had taken it into his head to trust his fortunes to the open waters rather than attempt a landing on the island; but since this could not be they were compelled to make the best of a bad bargain. At least he was a picturesque ruffian, and rather pleased their ideas of what a smuggler or pirate should be.

But if the truth were known the fellow would turn out to be a very ordinary sort of cut-throat, a hobo or tramp of the ocean, equal to any miserable little game that promised him boodle, and without a shred of the honor which those old-time worthies used to boast, along with their undoubted valor in affrays of savage sword-thrusts and pistol shots. Of course he would have to take his turn doing the labors of the day, and while Teddy patched at his boat and Maro fished for their dinner, the newcomer might be set at various tasks of a less congenial nature. If he grumbled or rebelled, why, they were two against one, and as the original settlers on the

island had the right to command obedience to their wishes. You remember how old Robinson enforced his laws and subdued the rebellious Atkins and his turbulent followers.

All the same, the coming of this fellow destroyed much of the charm that had hung over their experience. They could no longer sleep in absolute security, but one must be constantly on guard for fear lest the fellow be tempted to murder them in order to fall heir to their possessions. They understood from the expression on his face when the wonderful story of their being cast on the island was being narrated, that he took it all with a grain of allowance. Perhaps he fully believed such daring youths could only be in these seas with the idea of uncovering some fabulously rich treasure, upon the track of which they had been put through a possible bit of yellow parchment that had fallen into their hands. There is nearly always this clew to every one of the stories connected with the finding of Captain Kidd's spoils. He told them where the island was located, and

that others lay not more than fifty miles to the west, which of course was welcome information to the young marooners. If the weather held fair for a couple of days they could easily reach one of these other islands in the patched-up *Loon*.

It was not very pleasant to think of having this vagrant sleeping alongside, but that must be endured for one night. On the following day, since their quarters were so very crowded, he must construct some means of shelter for himself. How easy it was to plan! and yet in a wink of the eye the best laid schemes of men have been tumbled to the earth by circumstances of which they had rested in ignorance. It happened with the boys, and the shock was deadly cruel, since they had no warning of its approach.

While they sat steaming their garments before the blaze, and putting such questions as occurred to them to the rescued man, Teddy's quick ears caught the plain and unmistakable sound of voices outside. Antonio also heard the same, for he instantly sprang to his feet, an

expression on his face that looked for all the world like fear.

“You say you alone on dis key; then it be de captain and the rest of de crew. Look you out; bad men all dem I tell you, boys. S’pose you not say you see me; they p’r’aps kill me if they find. I crawl out dis way den, you see,” and to the utter astonishment of the two lads he suited the action to his words, actually wriggling like a snake under the side of the shelter at a place where his quick eye had noticed a space inviting his attention.

This certainly smacked of mystery. What could Antonio have done to make him dread the others? At any rate, he had seen fit in his Conch language to warn them; and if the balance of the shipwrecked crew proved to be any more formidable looking than the same Antonio it certainly was up to the boys to be on their guard. They had little opportunity to exchange words with regard to the strange antics of Antonio, for the voices came closer to the rude door, which immediately was pulled roughly

open, and a string of men pushed into the interior.

At the sight our boys felt their hearts grow cold with a sudden dread, for if appearance went for anything these fellows must be as tough representatives of the West Indies as one could find in a month's tour of the various islands.

CHAPTER VIII.

DA GAMA, THE SPONGER.

One of the spongers was a black Senegambian, another appeared to be a graceless Conch, dropping his "R's" just as freely as might a Cockney in old London, while the balance undoubtedly had Spanish blood in their veins, to judge from their swarthy skins.

Taken as a whole, they made a fine stage appearance, and under other conditions Maro might have hailed their coming on the scene with more or less enthusiasm, as something to break the monotony of their existence on the lone isle; but when he considered how completely himself and companion must be in the power of these unscrupulous-looking rascals, he believed he would much sooner put up with their room than their company. However, it was not

their pleasure to say whether the five newcomers should stay or depart hence. Teddy saw trouble in store, and it required considerable gritting of his teeth to keep his fears in subjection.

It was an easy task to pick out the valorous Vasco Da Gama, as spoken of by Antonio, for he towered head and shoulders above all his companions, who were unusually squatty in build. Moreover, he swaggered and walked, after the manner of a petty despot. The men began to sniff the atmosphere eagerly. Evidently the fumes of coffee had an irresistible attraction for each and every one of the quintette. Perhaps it was not every day they feasted on such a royal drink, and to come across it in this unexpected quarter aroused their liveliest hopes.

Teddy mentally groaned, seeing the finish of their slender stock. He was something of a philosopher, however, and knew how to make the best of a bad bargain. If the thing had to be, why cry over it, when there was an abundance of coffee in the wide world, if they could

only get to it. Accordingly, he greeted the newcomers heartily, and said he was delighted to see they had cheated old Davy Jones out of his expected prey, all of which the others took with a grin, and while one began to poke at the fire, another took up the coffee-pot and began to shake it significantly, as if to gently hint that their longings ran that way.

Teddy was equal to the occasion, and taking the pot dumped half of their stock of precious coffee into it, filled it up from the water can, and set it on the fire.

Maro also showed his hospitality, for he too, grasped the situation, and knew how they must presently find themselves at the mercy of these rough fellows, so that an early good impression was worth something to them.

The absence of any spring of fresh water on the island had in the start appalled the boys, and they feared lest they might suffer all manner of tortures from lack of the same. A can had come ashore in the remains of the *Loon* which held several gallons, but this would have

been soon finished and their outlook as serious as before, had not Maro, knowing a thing or two from his association with sailors who had suffered all the horrors of shipwreck, set to work digging in certain parts of the island, with the result that they actually discovered a spring. True, the water had a decidedly brackish taste, but by boiling the same and allowing it to cool, they found it palatable enough for those who should not be choosers.

By degrees, as they devoured the meal set before them, quaffing huge draughts of the clear coffee which Teddy, as an experienced camp cook, knew how to concoct, the men became more familiar, and, asking questions which our boys could not avoid answering, they learned the facts with regard to the presence of the couple. They, too, seemed to have more or less suspicion with regard to the truth of the story, just as Antonio had done. Indeed, it looked as though the spirit of treasure-seeking possessed every living being in this sea, the name of which has ever been linked with the bold deeds of these

old-time buccaneers, and that it was hard to believe any person would come to one of these lone islands unless possessed of some expectation of locating hidden spoils. It might come hard convincing these chaps that buried gold was the last thing either of them had in mind.

The men showed a little consideration in proposing to sleep outside on this night; but Maro felt sure this spirit would not last, and in a short time they might find themselves waiting on the set as servants to their lords and masters.

Oh, if the boat had only been in a condition for use, how eagerly would they have stolen away while the night lasted, and left the sponger crowd to their late possessions! But alas! even this prospect was barred by the incomplete condition of the *Loon*.

It may be readily understood that our boys found little sleep on this night, with such a dreary prospect staring them in the face. Apparently there may be worse things than merely being shipwrecked. Troubles find a fellow out

on a lone island as well as at home in the midst of plenty.

They talked in whispers half of the night and tried to agree on some plan of action whereby their condition might be improved; but their hearts were heavy, for at times the rough voices outside were raised in oaths, and they could easily see what was apt to befall them on the slightest pretext, from such rough characters, with no law or authority to intimidate them.

Luckily the shotgun had been out of sight at the time the five men crowded into the shelter, and after much consultation it was agreed that if such a thing could be accomplished the weapon had better be hidden entirely, so that in case their condition at any time reached a desperate pass they might at least have one means of defending themselves.

How to accomplish this was the question. Suspicious as the men were, if any one caught them stealing off it would naturally be supposed that they had some treasure secreted on the island, and once let that idea get into their

heads, torture would be resorted to in order to force a confession. Teddy solved the puzzle. When all was quiet without, save an occasional stertorous snore that told of deep slumber, he took the gun, together with what ammunition they possessed, and crawled out from the back of the hut. The men were lying in front, as that place offered better advantages for resting in fair comfort; and if he could only succeed in copying the tactics of the Indian guides with whom he had hunted moose up in his native Canada, all might be well.

The lad deserved credit for the manner of his departure; and Maro, who watched the recumbent forms as seen in the moonlight, holding his very breath in suspense, was gratified to see that not a man of the lot so much as sat up to listen. In half an hour Teddy came back with just as much care as had marked his departure; but Maro, watching, saw the captain raise his frowzy head as though he might be listening, and he did not feel quite so confident as before that no suspicions had been aroused.

With the coming of morning trouble began right away. A demand was made for breakfast, and the very last of the coffee went as a sacrifice to satisfy the longing of the sponger crew; and sad to relate, those worthies so far forgot their breeding that not one of them thought it worth while to offer the hosts a taste of the ambrosia, so that they were compelled to drink water with their breakfast. And now everyone was on the same footing so far as coffee was concerned, since the canister was quite empty.

The men manifested no great desire to do anything looking to their getting away from the island. So long as there did not appear to be grave danger of starvation, which could hardly come upon them with their two active cubs to procure provisions from the sea larder, they did not mean to exert themselves any more than might be absolutely necessary. Sooner or later a vessel would heave in sight, upon which they could embark.

Meanwhile, each day would be like its pred-

ecessor, and meant so much idling around. If that were all, our boys would not have complained, since they had a decided penchant for fishing, and Teddy did not hesitate to show his ability as a chef; though it did gall him some to see those lazy rascals lying around giving orders as to just how they liked their fish done.

He put in as much time as he could pottering away on the boat, and tried to arrange matters so that while it would seem as though considerable work might remain to be done, in reality the boat would be in condition for service. It was his belief that sooner or later if the worst came he and his chum would be compelled to slip away in the dead of night, taking all the desperate chances of finding themselves adrift on the great and treacherous Caribbean with little or no preparation for the cruise.

What puzzled them during that first day was in connection with the fellow whom they knew as Antonio. Why, he had vanished as completely as though he had cast himself into the sea; and yet neither of them were of the opinion

that he would do so foolhardy a thing. There seemed so slender a chance for hiding on the island that it was almost incredible to imagine a fellow could remain out of sight during a whole day, with those five men roaming over every foot of land comprised in their dominion, and bounded on all sides by the sea.

It was Teddy who solved the question. That night he chanced to be awake when he was filled with curiosity and concern to realize that some one had crept into the shelter about in the same manner as he had gone out when bent on hiding the precious firearm. He was unable to see the party, but knew of his presence, and could hear him prowling around a certain quarter where the provisions were kept in stock.

His belief at the time was that one of the rascals had conceived the idea that there were valuables hidden among the culinary utensils, and had taken this opportunity for making an investigation, unbeknown to his companions. Teddy made no move, and finally the fellow departed in the same stealthy manner as he had

come; but in the morning the lad noticed some of the hardtack on the ground, and it flashed over his mind that after all it had been Antonio who was the ghostly night visitor, and that the fellow had been rummaging after food, being desperately hungry after his fast of a day.

This made Teddy more curious than ever with regard to where his hiding-place might be. While he worked at the boat that morning he was puzzling his mind over the question, and wondering if there could be some manner of a cave on the island, the presence of which Antonio had located, when he received a pointer from an unexpected quarter.

CHAPTER IX.

MODERN BUCCANEERS OF THE CARIBBEAN.

Twice during the last ten minutes had Teddy felt some trifling thing strike him, but being so busy in mind and body he had paid but little attention to the fact; when, however, he received another tap as though something had fallen on his head from above, he was constrained to raise his eyes. A palmetto tree, young, vigorous and with a bushy top, towered above him, and some slight movement caught his attention. His first thought was ridiculous, for he wondered if, after all, the island could be inhabited by monkeys, and that one of the tribe was even now amusing himself by peppering the worker below. Almost immediately Teddy realized the absurdity of such a solution, and then something like the truth began to dawn upon his mind.

It was Antonio, who with the agility of a sailor had found little difficulty in scaling the palmetto, his bare feet acting fairly well in lieu of the customary spurs used by linemen in the telegraph service. And snugly he had lain hidden in the midst of that crown of foliage, while the hot sun had fairly blistered his flesh. Truly he must have good reason for fearing the captain and crew of the wrecked sponger, to take such trouble in order to avoid a meeting with them.

“Hello, aloft there! what’s the news?” sang out Teddy; whereupon the bunch of leaves parted to disclose Antonio’s anxious face, as he made eager gestures as though begging the lad not to betray him. Perhaps it was a serious matter after all, and Teddy did not wish to see the fellow murdered in cold blood. Besides, if it came to open rupture, and the occupants of the sand-key took sides, it might be to their advantage to have Antonio assist in keeping the others in subjection. So he toned down his voice and held a little conversation with the

fellow in the treetop, whereby certain arrangements were discussed, and a code of signals agreed upon, by means of which they could communicate without exciting the suspicions of the spongers.

Antonio reiterated his declaration that the captain was a bad man, who had been guilty of many crimes in the past, and would not hesitate at anything in order to carry out a whim. This was rather distressing information to Teddy, who hoped sincerely that the ogre might not take a sudden fancy to maltreat Maro or himself.

Antonio professed to be fairly comfortable in his airy perch, and at any rate declared it much preferable to being on the ground, at the mercy of the men he had reason to fear. He made no mention of the cause of the enmity between them, nor was Teddy at all curious to know, since of the two he much preferred Antonio, though at one time he had thought that worthy a tough proposition indeed. Comparison, it seems, changes many of our opinions.

Teddy made fair progress on the boat, occasionally speaking to the man above when the coast was clear. Once he saw the captain hovering not far away, and fearing lest something might have excited suspicion, perhaps the sound of his voice been heard, he began to troll out a ditty connected with a lass who loved a sailor, and who wandered along the beach each day waiting for the one who did not come, until finally his body drifted in at her feet, telling the common story of shipwreck, as known to almost every family along the fishing coast. Captain De Gama sauntered off, apparently satisfied, and Teddy heard a low laugh above his head, telling that the man who hid up there had witnessed the whole affair and was pleased.

Meanwhile, Maro fished with poor success. Something seemed to possess the denizens of the deep on this day, for they came most unwillingly to the bait, and when noon arrived he had hardly caught sufficient to satisfy the voracious appetites of the five stout chaps who lay around waiting for a sail to heave in sight.

They had begun to help themselves from the scanty stores, and it became evident that in a brief time there would not be an atom of the same left, so that they must depend entirely on what was taken from the sea. The afternoon proved a little better, so that enough was laid in to do them for supper all around.

In many ways the uncouth men were beginning to let the boys understand that on a lone island in the sea might made right, that education had its limits, and the lack of it did not make a man inferior in the least. In plain language, they began to grow abusive, and even vented their feelings in vile language when something did not exactly suit their lordly ideas of what was proper. Maro turned white when one of the ruffians first swore at him, but he had had considerable experience among rough characters, and knew how at many times it paid to keep a close tongue, especially when nothing was to be gained by answering back. It would soon go from bad to worse, and perhaps end in a fight, in which the boys could hardly be ex-

pected to hold their own, and must suffer the consequences. They hoped to be able to take French leave before matters came to this desperate pass.

As the matter of food had now begun to assume an important phase in their existence, our boys started out along the beach when night settled down, hoping to get on the track of another turtle, for during the day Teddy thought he had discovered traces of one having come ashore on the preceding night. The captain sneaked after them, as though loth to believe this could be the true reason for their issuing forth. They were fortunate enough to run across an industrious and hard-shelled settler about an hour after midnight, though it was only by great luck they managed to keep the crawler from entering the water with one of them perched on her back and the other striving to prod a stick under her flippers in order to capsize the game. Hearing their shouts Da Gama appeared on the scene, showing how closely he had been following them all the while; and

between the trio they succeeded in reducing the huge monster to a state of helplessness by turning her over and attaching a hawser to a hind flipper, the other end being fastened to a tree. The prospect of steaks and stews was now rosy for a day or two, and then eggs galore had been found, with which to make omelets that would tickle their appetities, weary of fish alone.

The next day while fishing, Maro discovered another bonanza, in the shape of a small bed of luscious oysters. They were attached to certain of the coquina rocks where the sheepshead hung out, which of course accounted for the presence of that fish in hordes, since its favorite food consists of young bivalves, which it crushes between its strong jaws.

As long as these held out there was little danger of their starving; but the supply did not seem of any great proportions, and accordingly Maro said nothing about it to the others, lest they soon demolish the whole bed. He whispered the fact to Teddy, who agreed with him that it would be wise to keep the secret.

By turns they could feast upon the oysters as necessity compelled. He groaned to think of what they missed in not being able to fry or broil the same over the fire, for nothing appealed to his appetite with greater force than fat bivalves roasted in the shell. He did tell Antonio, however, for it began to look as though the wretched man up in the tree might reach the starvation point if a further supply of provisions were not placed within his reach soon, for little now remained inside the hut.

When the boys reached their shelter after the capture of the turtle they found that the next step had been taken, and that they were as surely dispossessed as any poor tenant of an Irish landlord. The spongers slept in the hut, and there was no room for the original owners. So they had to crawl away and put up with what they could find.

It did not make them feel any more friendly toward the ungrateful fellows who could thus abuse the confidence of those to whom they owed so much; and if the occasion ever arose

whereby the selfish quintette could be left in the lurch, neither Teddy nor his comrade would be apt to feel any qualms of conscience about deserting them.

The men were growing more and more ugly every day, and it was easy to see that the cause lay in their being deprived of their customary tobacco and rum. They were irritable and ready to pick a quarrel on the slightest occasion. Indeed, already there had been several bloody encounters among themselves, and Teddy, who despised their whole breed, was wicked enough to speculate as to what a splendid thing it would be if they should by degrees wipe each other out, until there was only one left, whom they could easily master, with the aid of Antonio, if necessary. However, the pirates seemed to know just how far they could go without fatal results, and while dark threats flew around promiscuously, they stopped short of actual murder.

It was a very unpleasant position for our boys,

and required considerable care on their part to avoid an open rupture, which, after all, was only delayed, since sooner or later it would be forced on them by some ruffianly act which could not be borne.

Teddy believed he had the boat about ready for an emergency, if it came to the worst, though another spell or two would improve its condition considerably. Together they were applying themselves to the task of laying aside a little stock of provisions, enough to last them for a day or so when the time came to launch upon their daring cruise.

Da Gama had not given over his suspicious watching, but whether he suspected that they knew of buried treasure on the island, the locality of which it was his aim to discover through strategy, or that he had some hint of Antonio's presence in the vicinity, Teddy was at a loss to decide.

Another storm swept down upon them, during which the boys were most miserable, being

deprived of their cabin because the five men filled the hut to its utmost capacity.

A bright thought came to Teddy, which he communicated to his companion, and chasing through the rain to the spot where the little *Loon* lay they crept under her, finding the shelter they so much desired. It was so much better than they had expected, that they put up cheerfully with the discomfort. Besides, thinking of Antonio, drenched in that tree-top, and swung violently to and fro with each new sweep of the tempest, rather made them the more contented with their lot.

The next day they would have starved, the fish refusing to bite after the storm, only that to avoid trouble with the ugly men in camp Maro was compelled to raid the oyster bed, and bring in a bushel or more of the delicious hard-shells. There was riotous gluttony shown during the next hour, and by the time the lazy group had filled themselves the supply had gone down at a tremendous rate. But Teddy was enabled

to roast his fill and feast with the rest, which was about the only compensation they could find for the destruction of the choice bed of oysters.

CHAPTER X.

DIGGING UP THE TREASURE.

Perhaps, had there been unlimited quantities of those delicious oysters, an open rupture might have been indefinitely postponed, for the spongers were quite content to feast upon such dainty fare; but as fish continued to refuse to be hooked, and there was a dreadful dearth of other victuals, blame began to be cast upon the two whose duty it had become to provide for the camp. When such unruly souls feel the pangs of hunger, all their evil passions seem aroused.

Maro had kept track of the weather all day, for something appeared to tell him the hour of their deliverance must be close at hand. He was a little dubious as to the propriety of venturing forth on this particular night, for to his

sailor eye there appeared certain signs that seemed to promise rough weather inside of twenty-four hours, though he confessed that he might be mistaken, as even the best of prophets may be at times.

Just before departing for the camp about sundown, with the very last of the oysters that he could find, he chanced to glance out to sea. He was electrified to discover a sail. It was quite a distance away, and seemed to belong to only a small boat such as turtlers or spongers use in their business, but for all that it seemed to promise something of hope.

It was coming straight toward the island as if with the intention of landing some one there. Maro glanced up at the signal to find to his dismay that it had evidently been whipped from its place by the wind, and the remnant remaining could hardly attract attention from any passing ship. Night was almost upon them, at any rate, and it looked as if the incoming boat meant to draw close to shore, so that communication could probably be opened up later on. Of course he

must tell the others, though for a brief time he was figuring on whether such a thing would be to his advantage or otherwise.

As soon as he found Captain Vasco he announced the news. The big sponger was pleased, as could be readily seen, whether because of a chance to leave the island or from some other reason remained to be proven.

Maro found suspicions assailing him, and that they were not without foundation was speedily proven, for, calling the others around him, the captain gave it as his opinion that those who were approaching must be coming with the idea of either burying or digging up some treasure. In either contingency it must be to their profit to remain quietly in hiding until they learned the truth, and then it would be time for them to show their hand. The boat could be easily captured meanwhile, so that their escape from the island might be made sure of at any rate.

Of course our boys did not believe anything like this, for, not having hunted elusive treasure

all their lives, their minds were not crammed with thoughts along that line. To them the advent of the little craft was a simple thing, her crew being in search of shells for the curio market, sponges, or turtles, as the case might be; and chancing upon this lone islet they had determined to make a night of it ashore for a change. No fire was lighted, and supper consisted wholly of oysters on the half-shell. In like manner many a similar feast was partaken of by the aborigines who dwelt on these islands of the Caribbean Sea ages before Columbus ever dreamed of setting sail toward the setting sun in search of a shorter route to the Indies.

From time to time a scout came in to report progress, and finally the news was received that the sloop had anchored just inside the jaws of land forming a fair harbor, and that a boat was about to be launched.

Then Captain Vasco condescended to make a move. With a grunt he gained his feet and started in the quarter whence the lookout had come with his news. The boys were not slow to

follow, being desirous of having a hand in the game, whatever it turned out to be.

Now, the moon would not be up for more than two hours, and since no boat came ashore, it became evident they were waiting for light, not caring to risk their lives upon an unknown island in the dark. Which proved them to be cautious fellows at any rate.

Finally in the east appeared a broadening light telling that the lantern of the sky was about to show her smiling face, and that the period of darkness was at an end. Nor were any of them sorry, so great was the strain. And now a boat was seen coming ashore, in which several persons were seated, and of course the spongers found in this a cause for more or less excitement, believing as they did that fortune was about to blow rich things their way.

Our boys, meanwhile, had bigger fish to fry. They had taken advantage of the others' attention being wholly concerned with the advancing boat, and had proceeded to that part of the island where the *Loon* lay.

Maro unearthed the gun from its hiding place, while Teddy gave the signal for Antonio to descend from his uncomfortable perch, which the fellow did eagerly enough. They had discovered from various talks between the men that this same Antonio had struck the captain in a fit of passion, and the others had vowed to take his life for the insult. The coming of the storm had brought matters to a halt, for Da Gama was a man of deep hatred and doubtless he had not forgiven the Portuguese, though he believed him under the sea. The boys could excuse this dread on the part of the Portuguese, after they had seen the captain in a rage, for he certainly did present an appearance to make any one shudder. Everything was hastily done looking to a sudden departure, and then sober second thought made them pause.

The undertaking was so filled with danger that while a single hope remained they hesitated to embark. Perhaps it would be better to wait and ascertain who these newcomers were; there might be a chance to sail away on the sloop,

which, although a small boat for these treacherous waters, was at least far better fitted to cope with storms than the single-handed cedar cruiser, made only for inland sailing.

Accordingly, they left Antonio to watch beside the *Loon* while they crept around to the other side of the island to see what might be taking place there. Things were growing interesting, it seemed.

Upon landing, the little party had picked up some object and moved along the beach. They were led by a tall fellow who, as seen in the moonlight, made Maro think of Hamlet as he had seen that character played on the stage. He had an idea that Da Gama knew this leader; at any rate the captain and his men evinced the liveliest interest in what was going on, though they kept a safe distance away so as not to bring about discovery. And the movements of the newcomers were certainly erratic and mysterious enough to excite curiosity.

Having arrived at a certain place upon the beach they held a consultation, and while only a

part of what they said reached the eager ears of those crouching by, enough was picked up to give them cause for congratulation. Presently they began to measure with a tapè-line, as though desirous of locating a particular spot, according to some directions which the leader seemed to carry on a bit of paper, which he consulted from time to time, lighting a match in order to see, since the light of the moon was not sufficiently powerful. This looked like business, sure enough. These fellows had apparently gotten on the track of buried treasure, and the expedition was organized to recover the same.

What a bit of luck for Da Gama's crowd that fortune had deposited them on this sand-key at just the right time! Why, they were chuckling in high glee while they lay there peeping over the sand dunes, their eyes almost popping out of their heads in wonder. It was a peculiar sight, and if those who began to dig with spades had only been attired in more ancient garments, Maro thought he might easily have imagined it

to be Kidd and his bold spirits paying a visit to the scene of their lawless labors.

There were just three of the men on the beach. One was a squatty negro, who seemed to go by the name of Ham; the second, an angular individual, evidently a native of some West India island, while the third, the leader, had a twang in his voice that influenced Teddy, who had had experience with the tribe, to mark him down as a pilgrim from the North Carolina coast.

The two men with spades made the sand fly furiously, spurred on by the hope of a fat reward in case of success.

Da Gama and his followers began to creep carefully toward the spot, and while they did not take so much pains to keep their bodies concealed as before, no one noticed them, all being too much occupied in keeping tab with the work as it progressed. One of the diggers struck some hard object with his spade, and of course this significant incident brought out a round of delighted exclamations from the trio. Even Da

Gama grunted his approval, but the wash of the waves on the beach prevented those who worked from realizing that others were near by, just as much interested as themselves in the results of the raid.

Even the boys admitted feeling more or less enthusiasm as the situation began to reach the critical stage; and who would not with such conditions prevailing, a chest of treasure being dug up, which doubtless had lain in its snug hiding-place these centuries.

Maro, however, could not but wonder at the shallowness of the cache, and how it came that one of those terrible hurricanes had failed to wash the said chest from so insecure a hiding-place. He saw the man who directed operations bend suddenly down and seize hold of something, which, with a toss, he landed upon the sand. It was a box of some sort.

While the distance and the deceptive light prevented Maro from seeing as well as he would have liked, still he was positive that there was nothing about this thing to remind one of those

strong, iron-bound chests so often described in fiction as relics of the good old days when pirates abounded in these favorite waters. But then, perhaps this might represent the spoils of some modern buccaneer, some unfaithful cashier who had fled with all the capital of a bank, a second Boss Tweed, it might even be, and who was content to hide his plunder in a common, every-day soap-box.

Evidently the time had come when Da Gama thought he had better put in a claim for the discovery. He boldly advanced, accompanied by his followers, and the boys, influenced by curiosity, also walked forward.

The man with the nasal twang appeared to be almost beside himself with delight. His dreams were coming true, and now all that remained to be done was to open the chest and divide the plunder.

“Whar’s that ’ere hatchet? Let’s rip off the lid and feast our eyes on them sparklers. Don’t forgit our compact—to divide among

three, and me to git three shares because I got on the track of the thing.”

“And whar do we come in, Captain Bravo?” demanded Da Gama, as he led his contingent before the astonished diggers.

CHAPTER XI.

“GOOD-BY,” AND “HOW-D’YE-DO?”

The sudden appearance of these newcomers on the scene gave Bravo and his two assistants a severe shock, if one could judge from the manner in which they started back, and the exclamations of dismay that burst from their lips.

When, after infinite longing and much hard labor, men have reached the goal of their fondest hopes, it comes hard to hear a rough voice demanding a share in the spoils. And, naturally enough, Bravo was not inclined to share his find with these impudent interlopers who had not assumed any of the burdens attending its unearthing.

“What in thunder air you a-doin’ here, Da Gama?” he exclaimed, as the first natural result of his shock, and at the same time Teddy

saw him push in front of the box, as though endeavoring to hide the same from view.

“Same as you—I’m after that pot of gold, and, what’s more, we mean to have it, no matter what ye say,” declared the other whom a superiority in the point of numbers made bold. They were five to three, even without the boys.

Bravo thought not, and he said as much, coupling his words with certain strong expressions which he doubtless believed added to the force of his argument. He might be willing to divide the find on reasonable grounds, but it was his discovery, and he stood ready to fight for it if need be.

Hot words began to fly back and forth. Evidently, the strip of sand was about to witness a little affair pretty much on the same order of those entertainments which have made the name of Kilkenny famous.

Bravo, made reckless by the thought of being actually robbed of his legitimate spoils by the coming of these fellows, struck the first blow, and with such good will that he knocked one of

the other side, head over heels. Of course that precipitated matters, and there was a confused jumble of flying arms and legs as the parties became interlocked.

Our boys hardly knew what to do. Most certainly they would not lend a hand to help Da Gama's crowd overcome the strangers, nor did they feel like risking broken heads in taking up cudgels against the followers of the big ruffian who had lorded it over them for some time as ruler of the key. So they stood still and looked on while the men gouged each other pugnaciously, like so many beasts, all the while grunting and saying various things concerning each other which it would hardly be polite to repeat.

Five against three proved too great odds, and while the man from the North Carolina coast fought long and gallantly, he was outclassed by the giant Spaniard, who at last managed to trip him up, and coolly sat down on his prostrate body. This seemed to be the recognized signal that the game was over, according to the ethics of the prize-ring; for the other two chaps be-

gan to bellow for quarter, and threw themselves also on the sand, thus inviting some of their lusty assailants to a soft seat.

When the participants in the battle had in a measure recovered their breath, Da Gama demanded that the man upon whom he sat should own up beat and promise not to continue the struggle if allowed to regain his feet; to consider himself a prisoner, as it were, without the bonds; all of which he agreed to unconditionally. Then the subdued trio were allowed to get up.

They looked very morose, as who would not after having had such a glorious prize snatched out of their very hands.

Da Gama picked up the hatchet. Victors and vanquished gathered around the box, eager to discover what manner of treasure lay hidden beneath that cover. With a vim the captain descended upon it, ripping the lid off with one fell swoop of his tool. Then there was a groan and cries of wonder. Da Gama gnashed his teeth, while Bravo had the nerve to actually

grin, as though the galling stings of defeat were considerably lessened by the realization that if he did not get anything out of the game there were others in the same boat. For the affair was a huge sell.

Some one had played a trick on the confiding Bravo, knowing how wild he had always been to discover a treasure, and happy to accommodate him. The soap-box contained the body of a dog, perhaps once a pet on board a yacht cruising in these waters, and which had been duly buried. The wonderful figures on paper had been arranged in order to lend the proper amount of mystery to the game. And poor Bravo had organized this expedition for nothing. But he could at least remember the delicious sensations that swelled his heart as the box first came into view. It was worth something to have had such an experience.

Da Gama was the maddest of the whole lot. He seemed to think the joke entirely on him, and that in some manner he had been cheated out of his lawful prize by the other.

Bravo incautiously laughed out loud, and that was the last straw on the camel's back, for, turning upon him, the Spaniard proceeded to bombard the wretched coast sailor some more. It resulted in the three men being tied together like a lot of immigrants fresh in from the other side, and afraid of being lost. What would happen next?

There was the little sloop anchored just off the shore. Could it possibly hold the entire party, or would the vindictive Da Gama carry his revenge so far as to sail away with his little band, leaving the others prisoners there? He was capable of doing such a thing as a means of getting even with Bravo, who he felt had taken advantage of him. It was, of course, quite unreasonable in the Spaniard, but then who ever knew a furious and disappointed man to listen to reason?

When they saw the five men head toward the boat that was drawn up on the beach, the boys knew what they intended doing. Their first

thought was to run after the others and claim a share in the chance to escape.

It was not only the ugly threats of the men, who, turning, shook their fists at them, that made our young friends pause, but several other things connected with their situation. In the first place, they had little love for the crowd of evil spirits ranging under Da Gama, and it would really be a blessing to feel that they were rid of their company. Then, again, it seemed cruel to leave Bravo and his luckless companions bound as they were. Why, they might starve to death, unable to procure food while in this condition. Last of all was the reflection that they had the little *Loon* to fall back upon, and this had a strong influence in forming their decision, for Teddy bore the cedar craft that had carried him over so many hundreds of miles in safety considerable affection, as was only natural with a cruiser of long standing.

Standing there on the strand they saw the five ruffians jump into the boat and pull for the sloop, upon the deck of which they presently ap-

peared, when the anchor was raised, the sails hauled into place and away they went, sending back taunting farewells over the water, which would have given our boys more or less pain only for the fact of the other boat close at hand.

They now turned their attention to the writhing trio, who were so twisted up in the rope with which they had been bound that their supply of wind seemed in danger of being entirely shut off. The boys soon freed them and listened to a tirade from Bravo, who was terribly worked up over the theft of his boat, representing as the craft did the entire savings of years at his business of sponging.

He soon learned the truth concerning the presence of the others on the island, and calmed down a little when Maro told him how he would have Da Gama punished as a pirate when he reached Jamaica again.

The situation had changed about, and instead of Da Gama and his vile crew our boys now found that they were marooned in company with a man coming from their own country at least,

even though his style might not exactly suit their ideas of decency. Should they carry out their design to leave the island on that night? True, the cause for such action had been in part removed by the sudden flight of the other crowd; but they could not say they fancied Bravo very much, while those with him were a tough lot, to judge from appearances. Yes, it would probably be best to get away while the opportunity held out. Should these men discover the little boat no doubt they would think it the part of wisdom to play the same trick Da Gama had carried into execution, and, seizing the *Loon*, leave the boys in the lurch. Everything on the key would be left to them, and they should of a surety be able to subsist somehow until rescued, for they were men accustomed to snatching a living from the warm waters that teemed with life.

Surely the boys could send help when they found a harbor, and that would be better than remaining there to share the danger. Thus it was settled and the next part of the program

was to slip away from the three men while they were examining the shelter, together with what it contained.

Teddy still held the gun, which he had carried all the while, under the impression that possibly he might need the same; and if the new settlers made any attempt to hold them he was determined to threaten them with the firearm, which would probably have decided results, since it invited respect. Of course none of the others suspected a trick, and were so taken up with looking over their new possessions that the boys found it an easy matter to drop out of sight.

Once in the open, they took to their heels and made all haste in the direction of the tree where the boat had been left. Maro thought he knew the place as well as he did his own name, but rubbed his eyes upon discovering not a sign of the *Loon* where they had left her.

Could he have become twisted in his bearings and come to the wrong quarter? He was just trying to make himself believe that such a thing

must have happened, owing to the unusual state of excitement which surrounded them, when he noticed the chips on the ground, and knew this was the place beyond a doubt. Then where was the boat?

“Antonio?” exclaimed Maro, aloud. No answer came.

“The rascal has fled with the *Loon!*” exclaimed Teddy, almost heart-broken over his loss.

It began to look that way, though the boys still held fast to a gleam of hope as they followed the trail left by the boat while being dragged to the beach.

Once there, all doubt was removed, for neither the boat nor the swarthy sponger could be seen, though they looked eagerly out upon the moonlit sea. Doubtless, alarmed by the sound of fighting, when the rival seekers after treasure had come to blows, Antonio, timid of heart, had thought discretion the better part of valor, and had decamped, leaving his friends, the American lads, worse off than before, since they now

had no sign of a boat, nor material with which to construct an outfit. With heavy hearts they turned once more to the shelter under the palmettoes, where Bravo and his fellows still poked around to size up their new possessions.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INDESTRUCTIBLE "LOON."

It looked as though the whole game must be gone over again, and under conditions less encouraging than before, since their stock of food was now woefully limited and the matches few and far between, while chances of leaving the desert isle appeared more slender than ever. Still, young blood does not long despond, and our boys began to build up new hopes. It was just as well that they could find more or less comfort in the change of companions. There were now three instead of five, and the chances were Bravo would prove a vast improvement over the burly Spanish adventurer.

If the impulsive Antonio had only waited to see what came of the duel, all might have been

well. Teddy was fain to believe the fellow, being treacherous by nature, had always intended running off from them at the first opportunity. He would not give him credit for the ordinary amount of gratitude toward those who had saved his wretched life. However, it was folly crying over spilt milk, and, making the best of a bad bargain, they rejoined the trio, first having concealed the shotgun in the same old place.

Teddy and Maro took up their quarters in the cabin again, just as though they had never been forced out of the same, and thinking to save themselves more or less trouble they invited Bravo to share their shelter, which he immediately agreed to do, letting his fellows shift for themselves.

Thus, in a measure, the boys had bound the new commander to their fortunes. He asked a thousand questions, it seemed, and would not think of trying to sleep until he had learned just how they chanced to come here on this lonely key, in company with that desperate lot of good-for-nothings under Da Gama, who, Bravo de-

clared, had he only lived in Kidd's time would have been as picturesque a pirate as ever gently cut a throat or looted a Spanish galleon.

About midnight quiet settled over the camp, save for the nasal trumpetings of the native who lay stretched outside on the beach, regardless of mosquitoes or sandflies.

Some hours later Teddy, chancing to awaken, and being troubled in his mind, sauntered forth to walk along the beach. Perhaps he had a lingering hope that Antonio might relent and come back for them; but this died away after he had tramped completely around the island without discovering the faintest trace of boat or Portuguese spongers.

The moon hung high in the blue heavens and made a night long to be remembered. Teddy was filled with vain regrets that their splendid scheme had been nipped in the bud, for with such a gentle night breeze as held forth they might have sailed many miles toward the west, where other islands were supposed to lie. He had also hoped to discover another turtle, but

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disappointment awaited him in this particular also, for not a living, moving thing caught his eye on the glistening beach, where the little waves crept gurgling up in winrows, only to fall back after their ineffectual bombardment of the shore, warfare that had been going on for countless ages, with little effect. So Teddy, yawning, crawled into the shelter once more and snuggled down to secure further rest. It was broad daylight when he came out again.

Already the fellows had replenished the fire, and were wondering where their breakfast was coming from. Maro set them to work, thinking it wise to begin differently with this lot, and assume the position of leader from the start. He showed them where bait could be found, and with a line apiece they began fishing for breakfast.

It is not the most satisfactory occupation in the world, and if the scaly denizens of the deep choose to act shy, one's stomach is apt to complain. It happened, however, that one of the men was a skillful fisherman, and could get

game if there was half a chance; so that presently he landed a sheepshead that weighed all of three pounds, upon which Bravo pounced and began to prepare for the pan. This served to brighten things up a bit, as the odor of cookery always appeals to a hungry man and makes him see the silver lining to the clouds.

Bravo became social over the meal, and the boys voted him a vast improvement over the gruff Dago. Maro even washed his cuts and bruises received during his scrap with the giant on the preceding night, and which might give trouble if not taken care of, owing to the heat and the prevalence of insect life on the key. Thus the new deal was started.

Teddy was disconsolate without his pet craft to tinker with, and never came in sight of the ocean without sending a wistful glance across the waters, as though still hopeful that Antonio might think better of it and return. But the Portuguese evidently knew a good thing when he found it, and was plowing across the sea in the direction of the nearest land, making the

little cruiser do her level best, for a sailor can find himself at home on any sort of a floating chip.

After all, their predictions of the preceding night came true, with regard to the weather, for about noon clouds scurried across the sky, and the wind increased to an ugly blow. Maro declared he would not be entirely happy if caught out on the open sea in such a cockle-shell of a boat while such a storm was apparently brewing, and becoming philosophical explained to his grieving companion how it might after all have been the very best thing in the world that Antonio got away with the *Loon*, thus removing the temptation from them. It might not be pleasant, this remaining prisoners on the sand key, but truly there were worse things than that to be endured, and one of them was a sudden sinking of the boat to which one's fortunes had been entrusted, leaving the adventurer floating on the rolling billows, the sport of the storm.

They made what preparations they could against the coming spell of bad weather. An-

other fishing expedition was instituted, and Maro skirmished around the oyster bed, picking up such innocents as might have escaped his last scrutiny. The others secured an amount of fuel, though this was more difficult to find now that a fire had been burning almost continually since the first landing on the key two weeks previous.

When the deluge descended they were snugly housed, and could afford to smile at this part of the thing; although the presence of the ugly darkey, Ham, was an objectionable element to Teddy, who in his Canadian home had seldom come in contact with negroes. It howled at quite a lively rate during the evening, and the boys no longer envied Senor Antonio, if so be the slippery Portuguese still navigated the boundless reaches of the Caribbean in the little shallop of a cedar cruiser. He must be thoroughly frightened by this time. Perhaps the boat had taken in water again, despite Teddy's patching, and was floating almost level with the sea, with her passenger clinging to the mast in

desperation. Yes, there were other things less pleasant than this huddling under the shelter on the sandy island.

Their only secret now consisted of the gun that was hidden in the hollow heart of a palmetto tree, where the rain could hardly reach it to cause rust; and there they intended it should remain until such time as it might be needed to preserve their lives and liberties.

While they sat around, trying to cook something for supper, very naturally the conversation was upon a familiar topic, and this the fashioning of logs into a sort of craft such as the natives use in certain parts of the world. Bravo declared it could be done, if the hatchet only held out, and announced it as his purpose to begin work as soon as the storm permitted, which declaration pleased the lads not a little, as it proved the mettle of the North Carolinian.

It was to be only a matter of time ere they quitted their island for other quarters. Bravo would do it, he was the man to rough-hew the

logs into a life-raft that would bear them all up in the midst of the roughest weather. They liked this style of talk, and backed him up in every possible way, promising assistance as needed.

The storm lasted pretty much all of the next day, though changing its location radically as the core or center of disturbance swept past, heading as usual due west, where, striking the southern coast of Cuba, it would probably rebound to the northwest and ravage the coasts of Florida. The boys calculated that long ere this Antonio must have paid the penalty for his rashness with his life.

When the rain finally let up they went along the beach to ascertain what damage had been done, as well as to see if something might not have been cast ashore in the shape of flotsam which would prove of value in their housekeeping.

Being thrown on their own resources is apt to make boys careful, as well as saving, and whenever they saw bits of wood on the beach the

same were tossed further up on the land, so as to be safe from the next sweep of the tide. In due time when dried thoroughly it would prove fine in the shape of material with which to boil things and do general cooking. Some cocoanuts came ashore, possibly being a part of the cargo of a freight schooner bound with the same to some port of the States. These our boys seized upon with eagerness, and were soon engaged in drinking the liquid contents, which tasted simply delicious after the decidedly brackish water of the spring. There were also several logs of mahogany, washed ashore from the deck of a lumber vessel, and which, despite their value, might be made to do valiant duty in keeping up the fire that must burn day and night in order to save matches.

Then a remarkable thing happened. Teddy caught hold of his friend's sleeve and pointing ahead made some unintelligible sounds; but Maro did not need assistance in discovering what he wished him to see.

“Glory, it's the *Loon!*” he exclaimed, hardly

knowing whether he was awake or dreaming. There the little boat lay on the beach, just as the sea had cast her up, the old opening showing in her side, so that she had again been sustained by the air-tanks alone.

It was simply amazing, to think of her having been carried back over her course by the storm, and then left upon the island just as though the contract called for such a thing. Never in all his experience had Maro heard of such a miraculous happening. Why, it looked as though the demon of the storm recognized the fact that the legitimate owner of the marvelous craft had been deserted on this bit of sand, hardly more than a speck in the tumbling waste of waters, and had taken especial pains to bring the boat back to where it belonged.

Teddy ran up to the relic and handled it with genuine affection, examining it to see how severe the damage had been, and declaring he could repair it again with even more speed than before, since he had now gone through some experience in the business.

And what of Antonio—had he been drowned? It looked that way, and there were certain things about the boat that puzzled Teddy. He pointed to a broken painter which he declared had not been there at the time they last saw the *Loon*; and finally he announced it to be his opinion that the sloop had probably come upon the smaller boat, the crew forced Antonio to come aboard and give an account of himself, while the *Loon* was towed behind until in the storm the painter had parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GIFT OF THE STORM.

“A friend in need,” remarked Maro, smiling with pleasure.

“Yes, I should say badly in need of further repairs, which I’ll be only too glad to give. Why, life seems worth possessing now that I’ve got the *Loon* under my care again,” declared Teddy, rubbing his hand affectionately along the smooth surface of his pet.

“It seems as though we were fated to owe our escape to your boat, and it’s useless trying to avoid destiny; but so long as we manage to get away from this miserable dot in the sea I for one care mighty little how it’s done. So I say, doubly welcome to the *Loon*, and long may she flirt her saucy nose above the briny deep. Why,

I guess she's about as hard to down as one of the wild birds she's named after."

They hauled the boat to her former anchorage, which act no doubt quite satisfied the cedar craft. The old place under the palmetto must have possessed wonderful attractions for the wanderer, since in making her second landing she had come within biscuit-toss of the location.

So eager was Teddy to get to work that he would allow nothing to delay him, but hunting up material began once more the task of mending the broken side. As he had said, experience would enable him to work with more rapidity, and possibly a couple of days might see the job completed.

Maro felt as though he had a weight taken from his shoulders, and could turn his attention to the task of procuring food with a light heart.

Nor was this all that the storm brought them. During the morning there washed up on the sand a box that apparently must have come from some wrecked vessel, and which aroused their liveliest anticipations until opened, when

to their great delight it was found to contain packages of rice done up in paper—that is, it had once been so, but the whole contents of the case now presented a sad jumble, having been soaked thoroughly in the water. Maro set to work trying to save a portion of the goods, spreading the rice out to dry in the sun, after thoroughly washing the grain in fresh water; and the result was fairly satisfactory, though in cooking of the same they never had to bother adding seasoning.

It is wonderful what strange legacies that whimsical Old Ocean sometimes bestows upon those favored by fortune. This was a red-letter day all around, it appeared. The finny denizens of the deep were ready to lend their aid to making it a memorable occasion, for they showed a ravenous appetite, and, as Maro declared, were sighing for the pan, insomuch as to even snap at an almost bare hook.

So Bravo and his companions began to believe the island was after all not so bad a place upon which to be stranded, and save for the loss

of the sloop, together with their unsuccessful treasure-seeking, they had little reason to growl.

Maro had conceived an aversion toward the negro from the start. Perhaps it was the fellow's repulsive face and figure, for Ham certainly was no beauty and might have passed for an imp from the lower regions in any minstrel show. Then again he had a habit of staring with his big ox-eyes, as though filled with envy, and a desire to appropriate everything in sight; so that taken altogether, he was hardly the kind to impress one favorably. Perhaps in the long run Maro might learn something to his advantage, and that it does not always do to judge a man from outward appearances alone.

As evening drew near, the New England boy liked to seat himself in a favorite nook and look out across the sea. It might be noticed that his gaze was always turned toward the north, showing that his thoughts reached out to the homeland. As for Teddy, he was of a more buoyant nature, and took to roaming as a duck does to

water, so that no longings of this sort gave him cause for anxiety.

The world was "his oyster," as Teddy was pleased to express it in his boyish manner, which he intended to open as the humor seized him; so that it mattered little on what part of the globe he found himself temporarily stranded. There would always be strange things to be seen for one who used his eyes.

From his reflections Maro was aroused by the clamorous summons to supper, Teddy utilizing a tin-pan and a big spoon in lieu of a gong, and for which purpose it answered admirably. The sun had disappeared, and already the afterglow was giving place to dusk, for there is little twilight in the Caribbean region, that being an attribute of more northerly quarters.

Looking toward the camp Maro was bound to confess that it did have a certain picturesque appearance, which would no doubt haunt him often in times to come, when he found himself confined within the brick and stone walls of a city, engaged, it might be, in some prosaic

work connected with an office, for he was much inclined to study law as a profession. The fire danced merrily and lighted up the figures of those around, making the negro look like a black gnome straight from the land of enchantment. Then the appetizing odor of fried fish was wafted his way, exciting his desire for food. And there was also another reason for him to sniff the air, an indescribable smell that, in a faint way, reminded him of coffee, but which he could not understand.

Teddy, bent on experimenting, had tried to copy after some of the new-fangled substitutes for the prized berry, and roasted some of the rice until it was half burned, when he succeeded in mashing the grain between the hatchet and something else just as hard. The beverage resulting from this triumph of genius was muddy and extremely villainous, but, situated as they were, with Hobson's choice confronting them, they considered that the chef deserved their thanks for extracting even this aroma from the unpromising situation.



"GLORY! IT'S THE *LOON*."
(Page 142.)

When fellows are determined to look on the bright side of things, it is astonishing how little it takes to make them laugh and feel good-natured; and there was much merriment over that supper of fried fish and rice coffee.

Bravo told how his folks often made a beverage from beans, wheat and rye, first browned in the oven and then ground. He declared they had learned to like this concoction during the war, when coffee was an unknown article in the entire South. Bravo was certainly a unique character and he rattled off many of his experiences during a lifetime along the coast from Norfolk down to Key West. Many of his adventures were humorous, and afforded our lads a hearty laugh, while others bordered on the mysterious, Bravo being, as it were, a believer in the supernatural.

Teddy showed a trifle of uneasiness at times, and his companion wondered what was worrying him; so while they sat together that evening, watching the stars that studded the azure sky, he demanded that the Canadian confide in

him. Perhaps he had an indefinite suspicion that Teddy, too, disliked the black, and suspected him of treachery.

To his surprise it was no such thing, and he found himself able to laugh at the fears expressed, they seemed so shadowy and without any foundation to him. Teddy declared their island seemed to have a peculiar attraction, a sort of magnetic power to bring all things that way. They had in the first place been thrown upon its hospitable shores, then came the spongers' vessel with Da Gama and his men, after which the sloop in search of gold showed up, and now last but far from least, their wonderful little cruiser had returned after a voyage of many miles. This being the case, Teddy found himself wondering whether sooner or later Da Gama and his rough followers might not drift back also, since it seemed next to impossible for anything to get away for good.

Of course Maro soon laughed the idea to scorn, declaring that it was beyond all reason, and the chances were they might never set eyes

on that crowd again. Although they had known each other only a few weeks, it seemed to the boys as though they must have always been acquainted, and no matter what the future had in store, it was certain that they would see much of each other from time to time.

That night was a peaceful one. The wind only blew gently and the waves lapped the shore. Quite in contrast to the previous one when the storm-king reigned, and it was difficult to sleep at all, what with the noises without, and the crowded condition of the shelter.

So ambitious was Teddy that, at peep of dawn, he stirred himself, and leaving Ham to cook breakfast, which he seemed capable of doing after his kind, the boy started to work on his boat, which had the greatest possible fascination for him. Maro was bent on exploring a certain reef which he had reason to believe might harbor a brood of fat bivalves. He had made a rude raft from several spare spars, which he paddled about on, there being little difficulty in

getting around so long as the sea was fairly calm and the wind kept quiet.

A glad shout attested some sort of a discovery, and presently Teddy saw him working away like a Trojan endeavoring to spear the trophies he could see down some six feet or so below the surface. It proved slow work, without some sort of tongs, and so coming ashore Maro proceeded to manufacture the apparatus needed to encompass a general capture of the shell-fish. This consumed pretty much all the morning, but it was worth while, for when he fairly got to work they had a royal feast spread before them.

He had come ashore with two loads, and, not satisfied, since the conditions might not be so favorable another day, had gone out again to rake up a third. While busily engaged in his labor he felt something strike his little float a severe blow. Indeed, he came near being pitched into the water, and only saved himself by a supreme effort.

Filled with wonder and consternation he

looked around, but nothing was in sight either on the sea or in the air, to which the shock could be ascribed. A movement beneath the surface drew his attention, and to his surprise as well as horror he looked into wicked eyes that seemed to glow with a fiendish desire to do him evil.

It was a shark, a monstrous fellow of the man-eating species, and Maro was always ready to declare it was his full belief the rascal had taken advantage of his occupation and bumped into the raft, with the intention of dumping him over, when he would be an easy mark for those cruel teeth that gleamed in such white and serried rows between those strong jaws.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOOD-BY TO DICKENS' ISLAND.

Filled with indignation at having been made the victim of such a scare, Maro thrust his paddle at the big shark, intending to prod him in the eye as a gentle hint to mind his own business, and not come prowling around where he was not wanted. To his utter astonishment the end of the paddle was seized between the jaws of the fish, and if he had not hastily let go he must have taken a plunge overboard.

This was beginning to look serious indeed. Why, that miserable old shark must mean business. Maro's shout attracted the attention of Teddy, who came running to the edge of the water to ascertain what was up.

When he learned the facts he saw that it was apt to prove a bad business, should the shark

be cunning enough to upset the little raft by energetic means. "Keep as still as you can, and don't excite him any more!" he called out, running off.

Presently Teddy came back with the gun in his hands. The others had also heard the noise, and were on the run for the scene, wondering what had happened.

Teddy called to them, and pointed to the *Loon*. Apparently his repairs had reached a stage that admitted of the boat being launched, and this was just what he wished the men to set about doing.

Maro had enough to do taking care of himself, for the ravenous fish was butting hard against the raft, as though bent on destroying the buoy that seemed to keep his intended prey away from his teeth; and each time his head came in contact with the light spars there was a shock that staggered the lad crouching there in alarm.

Really, Maro could be excused for feeling something akin to genuine terror as he contemplated those rows of glistening teeth so anxious

to tear him limb from limb. What made it worse was his utter helplessness. Could he have only had some means of fighting this persistent enemy, he would have felt better able to stand the situation. As it was, all he could do was to cling there and pray that Teddy would not arrive too late. The raft had not been made to withstand such rude assaults, and Maro was afraid that at any minute its fastenings might part, thus hastening the catastrophe.

Teddy had leaped into the cedar boat, while Bravo followed him with a pole, intending to act the part of propeller. They were coming with the utmost speed, and yet to Maro it seemed as though the *Loon* hardly moved, such was the state of his nerves.

Fortune was good to the imperiled lad, however, and despite the repeated shocks from the piratical fish the raft still held together until the others came.

Teddy had inserted a couple of buckshot shells in the gun, some of which he always made it a practice to carry on his various expeditions,

and which had been preserved along with the other ammunition.

The shark turned upon the new disturber of its peace, and rose as if to snatch a bite out of the modest cruiser's larboard streak. This was just the opportunity Teddy craved, and he sent a double load downward, firing one barrel immediately after the other.

Meanwhile, Maro had succeeded in clambering into the boat, which was headed for shore in a great hurry. Teddy had given the monster something to worry him, as was proved by the commotion in the water.

Maro thought now he had quite enough oysters for one day. His ideas seemed to have changed radically, showing how circumstances alter cases. Later on the raft washed ashore, and an examination showed the plain marks of the shark's teeth in the spars of soft pine. But the incident did not prevent them from thoroughly enjoying the grand feast of oysters in various ways that Teddy, assisted by his black aid, placed before them for dinner. Maro thought

them well earned. And it afforded him considerable satisfaction, after the scare he had received, upon sauntering out at break of day, to discover some bulky object cast upon the shore, in which he was quick to recognize his enemy of the preceding day.

Teddy had reason to feel proud of his marksmanship, for his lead had done fearful execution about the monster's head, despite the foot or so of water through which the buckshot had to pass. He was an object lesson, lying there on the sand, and Maro thought better of the fellow dead than alive.

The boat was ready for service, and all that remained was to settle as to their leaving the key. Five would crowd it somewhat, but since no ballast was carried the weight would not prove too much, if only they could avoid getting in one another's way. Food was what worried them most of all, since the supply had been totally exhausted, save as they drew upon their larder, the sea. All the oysters they could carry were put aboard. These would keep for days,

and save them from actual starvation in case of necessity. Besides, it was determined to cook what fish they were able, and the rice would also keep for a time after being boiled.

Fresh water was another source of anxiety. All the canisters were filled, so that they could count on a supply that would last a couple of days, if they were careful. In this warm country one becomes very thirsty. This is aggravated by the brackish taste of the water, while the very knowledge of scarcity adds to one's thirst.

That night was a busy one at the camp. They expected it to be the last on the key. For better or worse it was their intention to cut loose on the morrow, unless from the signs they had reason to believe another storm might be brewing.

It seemed hopeless to look for the coming of assistance, since the weeks had crept by and only one sail had been sighted. The boys had enjoyed the experience in many ways, but at the same time they would be delighted to see the

lone island vanish in the distance. Such healthy young spirits cannot long be satisfied to content themselves within such narrow borders. The world is too large and possesses too many attractions.

Neither of them slept well. Three separate times did Teddy, with a cruiser's customary anxiety, creep out of the shelter in order to survey the starry heavens and see what the signs of promise were. And on the last occasion he found Maro standing there on the open beach also taking an observation. But the night came to an end, as all things earthly must. Morning broke with a prospect for a hot day, but so long as this did not bring up a storm they cared little.

"The breeze is favorable," announced Teddy, as soon as he had appeared on the scene. It had come up early, and was already dimpling the water in a coquettish way, heading out of the south-by-east.

"Yes, and we'll have all we want before the day is over, if I'm a judge of signs," remarked Maro.

Bravo was called upon for an opinion, and expressed himself to the effect that if it didn't storm they would probably have a fine day, which was about all he would commit himself to. So the last meal on the famous sand-key was soon under way.

No more would the smoke of a camp-fire float seaward from this lone islet in the midst of the great Caribbean, and perhaps never again would fresh laughter sound along that beach, the scene of so many adventures in their short stay. All preparations were soon made, for they had but a limited amount of luggage to look after.

"All aboard!" sang out the skipper of the little craft. They had made use of the raft in order to get their things in the *Loon*, which had been anchored near the scene of Maro's adventure with the man-eater; and finally this last reminder of their Crusoe life was cast adrift.

Then the wind caught their sail, and they began to glide through the quiet water inside the jaws of land. Outside it would be rougher, though not a circumstance as yet to what they

must experience when the wind came up in force, and the swell of the ocean was felt.

They looked back to the little sand-key with more or less emotion. The smoke of their fire still drifted lazily over the spit at the extreme end of the island, and somehow it seemed to be reproaching Teddy for his base desertion; but he threw all cares aside and with his usual jolly good nature trolled a ditty suited to the occasion.

Well, they were off at last. Before them stretched the vast and mysterious sea, on whose broad bosom the navies of the world had from time to time floated, and the history of which must include much that was interesting connected with the rise of the United States to a world power.

All those aboard the small boat thought about was the chance of sighting an island where they might find others of their kind, and be able to board some vessel bound for Jamaica, or any place in touch with the world. Why, to hear those two lads talk you would imagine they must

certainly have been marooned for a cycle of years instead of a few brief weeks. They speculated as to what wonderful events had come about in the civilized world, and whether either of the great nations which they represented had gone to war. There was a sort of delightful uncertainty about thus being shut out from all news for a length of time; for like all young fellows of the present day they had become accustomed to reading every day all that had transpired around the world during the preceding twenty-four hours.

The boat justified all the praise which her proud master had ever bestowed upon her, for she certainly glided through the water like a veritable witch, and could, if necessary, beat up against the wind in a manner that quite took Maro's sailor heart by storm; for having spent his life pretty much in a seaport he knew little or nothing of these elegant little tricks which boat builders along the St. Lawrence fashion for those who delight to knock around in lakes or coast lagoons, cooking and sleeping aboard,

and able to navigate wide sound or narrow creek as the whim dictates.

They ran before the wind during the whole morning. Maro has his glass, and tried to see how long he could distinguish any sign of the little sand-key; but in an hour it had passed beyond range of his vision.

“That ends it,” remarked Teddy, when he learned that Dickens’ Island had faded completely from view.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Maro, with a malicious grin; “because, you remember everything comes back to that spot, and after we’ve sailed in a circle for a day or two, perhaps—”

“Drop it, old fellow,” interrupted Teddy, hastily. “Even the best of prophets is liable to make a mistake some time or other. We will try to keep away and resist the supernatural attraction by having our noses pointed toward the west.”

CHAPTER XV.

VOYAGERS ON THE CARIBBEAN.

Thus far the wind had been favorable, and they believed they must have covered fully twenty miles since starting out. Many an anxious glance began to be cast heavenward, for well they knew how treacherous these seas were, especially in surprises, and while they hoped for a continuance of smiling skies, at the same time they wished to be ready for trouble should it crop up.

Strange that they did not even sight a sail in any quarter. Bravo said again and again that this was very mysterious, and he appeared to suspect there must be a Jonah aboard, though he gave no hint as to whom he believed merited such an evil title.

And now the breeze died completely out, so

that there was not even a ripple on the surface of the sea. That was bad enough, seeing that it meant delay, and with a short stock of food on hand this would be apt to hit them hard; but there was more coming.

“Yonder are clouds peeping over the horizon,” announced Teddy, who, being a freshwater navigator, was unusually nervous concerning the ugly humors of the sea; though he had surely shown the right spirit at the time he found himself swept through the inlet and out upon the tumultuous bosom of the stormy Atlantic.

None of them felt very joyous over the appearance of the dark masses of vapor, low down on the horizon. Hot as the sun seemed, they would willingly have borne his darts uncomplainingly, rather than accept the chances of a squall. Twice had the stanch little craft defied the storm-king to do his worst, and the third time might finish the work.

Bravo idly pulled at the oars, moving the boat gently in the direction where their goal was sit-

uated; but it was more of a mechanical action on his part than any design to accomplish results. They were helpless to avoid whatever was coming, and could only prepare against the rush of wind and water, hoping for the best.

It was a false alarm, for when the clouds had covered the heavens the rain came down in a deluge, so that the voyagers found it necessary to bale their boat out in order to keep from being fairly swamped; but not a breath of gale accompanied the downpour. They could hardly believe their eyes, and impulsive Teddy, soaked to the skin as he was, fairly shouted his appreciation. They managed to add somewhat to their store of fresh water, as a result of the rain fall, so that instead of injuring their prospects it really added to their comfort.

When the sun broke forth again a most delightful breeze sprang into existence, wafting them on their course, though it now came out of the northwest, and necessitated their running close-hauled. With their fears relieved they became merry once more, and before the westering

sun sank low enough to dazzle his vision Teddy took a long and earnest observation with his glass, in the hope that somewhere in the west he might pick up a glimpse of land.

But it was not so ordained. They were fated to pass through other experiences ere reaching the finis of their eventful cruise.

That last hour of the blazing sun was very unpleasant, for old Sol did his best to torture their flesh, after the rain, and they were ready to heave a sigh of genuine relief when he condescended to fall out of sight, to cross the Pacific and gild the temples and kiosks of the Heathen Chinees.

With the coming of evening the wind also sank temporarily to rest, as usual, and a solemn hush fell upon the sea. How delightfully cool it became, once that scorcher of the skies had hied away to other fields! They stretched themselves, and the boys even took a dip in the briny, though urging their companions to keep a keen lookout for the dorsal fin of a shark; for since Maro's experience near the key both of them

had entertained new respect for piratical members of the shark tribe, and had no idea of furnishing a meal for so hungry a creature.

By eight o'clock the breeze saw fit to start into life again, and coming out of a quarter that still favored their purpose, the little cruiser was pushed right along.

That was certainly a night never to be forgotten. The crowded condition of the boat prevented such comfort as might have followed had there been but two passengers instead of five. It was a hard bed too, though extreme weariness caused them to ignore this fact. Teddy had made all needful arrangements for comfort in planning his long cruise, and was accustomed, when sleeping in the *Loon*, to blow up a rubber air mattress each night he bunked aboard; but during the wreck this arrangement had gone floating out to sea, and at any rate his condition at the time, with the cruiser half under water, would not have admitted the use of such luxuries. Beggars have no right to be

choosers, and this truth is often brought home to those who sail small craft with limited accommodations.

They took turns at keeping watch, so that one always held the tiller while the others slept. For want of a better compass they guided their course by the heavenly luminaries that shone overhead. It was easy to pick out the Polar star, and one of the bright planets happened to lie exactly in the quarter whence the little craft was headed.

When it was Teddy's turn to steer he pulled his coat around him, as it had come on quite cool about midnight, and settled down to a long seige of it. The wind still held out, and the cedar boat went merrily through the heaving sea, the water gurgling along her sides in a fashion to please the heart of one who delighted in cruising under any and all conditions. He had spent many days and nights in that same tiny vessel, but none of his former experiences could compare with the present. That glowing heavenly body flamed in the western sky, and guided him straight on.

How could he do otherwise than think how these old-time worthies, the Wise Men of the East, were led by such a faithful fingerpost.

Disappointment awaited them with the dawn, for the same monotonous line that marked the watery horizon stretched away in every direction. Neither of the boys said anything, but Bravo relieved himself of a choice variety of expressions concerning their miserable luck, and again gave stronger hints concerning his belief in the Jonah theory.

Maro, accustomed to reading character, believed they would be apt to have trouble with the coast mariner, if things did not improve before a great while. He kept the gun near him, and was grimly resolved to use it if the occasion demanded heroic treatment. Of course they had not arrived at the parting of the ways yet, and he sincerely hoped there would be no occasion to resort to such stern measures.

Their breakfast was eaten in melancholy silence. Every one seemed to be wrapped up in his own thoughts. The food was divided with

impartiality, as was right; but Teddy imagined he saw the greedy eyes of the black rest longingly on the share that was passed to the young Canadian, and this circumstance caused more of those suspicions to creep into his mind. He had read about all manner of terrible things being done by such descendants of the cannibals dwelling in the heart of Africa, when face to face with dire necessity; how they had naturally reverted to the horrible practices of their ancestors; and Teddy was determined that he would stand up for his rights so long as he had breath in his body.

The morning passed. More breeze than they wanted swooped down upon them and made things fairly hum. The spray was even snatched from the crests of the big waves and sent flying to leeward; while constant vigilance was required in order to keep the little boat from shipping vast quantities of water. They dared show only a tiny bit of sail, and even then their progress was extremely rapid.

Ever and anon, when they crested a billow,

Teddy would cling with one arm to the slender but stanch mast, while he clapped the glass to his eye and endeavored to make some discovery ahead. It was not an easy task, so that it may not be wondered at that he failed to discover land until it loomed up quite plainly. It was a welcome sight to one and all, for surely it gave promise that their trials might be ended.

That this could prove to be but another island in the tropic sea, void of human habitation, did not seem to occur to them at all, and yet such a thing was possible. As they were bearing directly down upon the land and would be smashed upon the breakers unless great care was taken, Bravo, as the most experienced sailor on board, took the tiller. Their only safe plan would consist in making a sweep around and coming up to the lee of the land that jutted out like a crooked finger.

Of course they rested in complete ignorance concerning the nature of the sea, and a thousand ragged rocks might be lying in their intended course, ready to tear the frail cedar boat into

tatters; but they had no choice, and had to accept the risk.

It was a time of supreme anxiety. Already the waters around them were boiling like a vast caldron, and at any instant Teddy expected to feel the dreadful quiver that would announce their coming in contact with a reef. When this occurred there would be small chance for any of them to escape through that whirling, churning mass of water.

Bravo held on with the tenacity of his kind, his teeth hard pressed together, his gray eyes burning with the intensity of his emotions, and his lantern jaws set grimly. Maro rather admired the North Carolinian just then, he represented such bull-dog resolution to conquer or die.

It was a close shave. Once or twice the boys gave themselves up for lost, for it seemed as though nothing under a miracle could prevent the boat from being smashed against some reef that reared its ugly head beyond; but as though some kind destiny had taken them in charge, they

avoided all these perils, and finally began to find smoother water, showing that in some wonderful manner the promontory had been rounded. Once more had the gallant little boat proved her title as a champion cruiser, and Teddy's heart swelled with pride, as well as thankfulness, for their escape, when he realized that the danger was a thing of the past.

Not until then did they think to even take a glance at the shore which was close by, and where the cocoanuts flaunted their feathery fronds in the strong breeze; and the first observation brought out cries of chagrin from the voyagers, for, lo and behold, they beheld anchored in a bight the little sloop which Da Gama and his men had run away with when quitting the sand-key!

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTAIN BRAVO'S LITTLE JOKE.

Teddy and his chum felt only dismay when their eyes fell upon the stolen sloop, for they realized that their troubles could not be called over, while such desperate ruffians as Da Gama and his crowd remained within reach. Thus storm-bound they must hobnob together until a chance opened to get away; though if the boys knew what was good for them there would be little familiarity between the rival camps.

Doubtless the sloop had put in here during that other storm, having been partially disabled and unable to continue the cruise without repairs. What a strange fate had now brought them together again; these rival adventurers whom the wide Caribbean refused to keep apart!

If our little company was surprised to set eyes again on the sloop, the amazement of the others can be imagined when they saw the boat which had once been left on the sand-key, and later sunk in a storm, so far as they knew, come sweeping into the harbor, loaded with the party they had so coolly abandoned.

They made a rush for the sloop and clambered aboard, doubtless under the impression that the boat would be the first object of attention on the part of the newcomers. Maro held on to the gun, fearful lest the angry Bravo might wish to take it and assault the enemy without even a parley. If he could help it there would be no such tragedy enacted there, while each of the hostile factions held a boat and could no doubt in due time reach a settled island.

How the others had supported themselves during these days they could guess. Cocoanuts will preserve life, and doubtless there was much to be obtained from the generous sea, when men were not too shiftless or lazy to work for their daily allowance.

One problem was solved; Antonio loomed up among the lot, proving that he was captured while afloat, just as they had surmised. He must have taken his medicine from the captain, for it appeared as though he were now hand in glove with the gang, and shook his fist in the direction of the late arrivals with just as much vigor as characterized any of the rest.

Antonio knew no such word as gratitude. But then Maro was not in the least surprised, for he did not have a high opinion of the man, and was rather prejudiced against him as a Portuguese.

The *Loon* was brought to anchor within a stone's throw of the beach. They were all wild to get ashore and stretch their limbs, which seemed badly cramped after their long voyage in a small craft; and as the only means of reaching land appeared to lie in each man's stepping overboard and wading, Bravo led the way.

Maro clung to the gun, which had already served him a good turn in connection with the shark, and might still prove valuable.

When the *Loon* was thus relieved of their com-

bined weight they were able to drag the boat ashore and lightly beach her. None of them felt any confidence in that motley crowd over yonder, and believed that if only half a chance offered they would steal the cruiser as well as the sloop, since nothing appeared too mean for their attempting.

While Maro stood guard, lying at full length on the beach, under the grateful shade of a coconut, the others proceeded to gather some of the products of the tall trees, the native showing astonishing agility with his bare feet in climbing. The hatchet was used to chop the tough husk away, and ere long each one of the party had a half-ripe nut to his lips draining it of the cool liquid contents, which tasted like nectar of the gods, after their long deprivation.

The fellows aboard the sloop kept watching them curiously. Perhaps they imagined Bravo would want to make an immediate assault on their works, and try to retake the vessel; and every man seemed to be armed with a cudgel of some sort, which he meant to use should the mat-

ter of possession come to blows. No doubt they wondered also where the gun came from, and did not fancy the looks of it, which was probably the main reason why they kept aloof, instead of attempting to intimidate the others, as on the former occasion.

Maro intended that they should see the double-barrel, and he took measures to hold it in plain view quite frequently. The others had moved away to discover what sort of a place it was they had struck, though not intending to wander far off. Bravo followed a plain trail, made by the others, and thus came upon a spring bubbling out of the earth.

It was almost impossible for them to get enough of that clear water, after existing so long on the brackish kind which the sand-key afforded them, and if nothing else turned up they would think it paid them to have found this land of flowing fountains.

Teddy was mystified to tell where the water could come from; but many things connected with these islands of the sea are equally mys-

terious. Thus do the magnificent springs of Florida, perhaps more than thirty yards across, and in a level country, hundreds of miles away from mountains, puzzle the scientists.

Meanwhile, Maro lying there on the beach saw signs of a movement on board the sloop. He hoped the fellows might consider it the part of wisdom to take a speedy departure, though with such a violent gale of wind blowing beyond the point he could not believe they dared venture forth.

When he saw Da Gama spring ashore from the stern of the boat, which was anchored in a deep hole close to land, Maro began to believe he scented trouble. He cast an anxious glance in the direction the others had gone, and gave the shrill whistle which had been agreed upon as a signal that they were wanted immediately. Unless they had wandered too far away this must bring them back post-haste.

The balance of the crowd followed their leader ashore. Maro did not like the looks of things. Six desperate ruffians, any one of whom was cap-

able of overpowering him; if given a chance at close quarters, that seemed heavy odds and only for the possession of the gun he would have felt compelled to run away. That firearm was a tower of strength just then, and he felt that the circumstances were such as to justify any action he might take, no matter if in so doing he found himself compelled to pepper the rogues good and hard with the bird-shot in each barrel.

He scrambled to his feet without delay. Already they were advancing toward him, and he deemed it the part of prudence to retreat to the boat, which he entered, thus being able to push off and place the open water between himself and his enemies.

Da Gama was calling out as he advanced, for though no coward he did not like the looks of the gun, even if some of his fellows vowed it could not possibly be loaded, and was harmless. Perhaps they would in due time discover how mistaken they were in this estimate.

From what Maro could make out Da Gama wanted to have a talk over the situation. That

is, he confessed to a desire that they bury the hatchet and all come together for the common good; but knowing the man's treacherous nature he believed his main idea was to get hold of that gun, which represented the element of power in his mind. Accordingly the New England lad aimed directly at the captain as he swaggered on to the beach.

“Halt! right there. I’m going to shoot if you come any further, and it’ll be mighty unpleasant for you, I give my word. Now have your little say. What d’ye want, Captain Da Gama?” he demanded.

“What’s the use being mad? Come, let’s get together again, and forget all dis troubles. We mend de sloop, so now, when de wind she goes down all us can sail away. Give me dat gun, you Maro!”

Apparently he could not resist exposing his principal motive in thus appealing for a cessation of hostilities, and Maro was shrewd enough to see through the game.

“We don’t want to have anything to do with

your crowd, being able to navigate this to the place we are aiming for. Go your own way, and we'll go ours."

The big Spaniard wanted to argue matters, and Maro noticed that he kept edging closer while he talked vehemently, which, he took it, meant that they contemplated a rush whenever the moment appeared propitious. So, to nip the thing in the bud, he took up the pole again and pushed the little boat out into deeper water. Da Gama growled in an ugly humor at being so neatly balked.

Just then Maro made a discovery that gave him something of a thrill, for chancing to turn his eyes in the direction of the sloop, what should he see but several figures creeping on their stomachs, and evidently apprehensive of being discovered. His first idea was that these must be natives belonging to the island, and bent upon some deviltry; but a second look disclosed the fact that they were dressed in such garments as might be worn by the ordinary run of men to be met with in these regions. The truth flashed

upon him when he made out Teddy second in the lot, and thus he knew it was a daring scheme on the part of Bravo to regain possession of his stolen sloop. Apparently when it came right down to scheming he was head and shoulders above the Spaniard.

Maro entered into the game with enthusiasm, believing that what was fair for one should be just as good for the other; and wishing to keep the attention of the six attracted toward himself as much as possible, he began to make extravagant gestures with the gun at the same time belching out a stream of oratory that would have paved the way toward fame if delivered in the right place. He succeeded in a fair measure in holding their attention, and had the satisfaction of seeing the four figures clambering over the stern of the sloop.

It happened however that Antonio of all men should turn his head and see what was going on. His shrill cries speedily put the rest in possession of the facts, and the wildest scamper imaginable took place, the pirates streaming over the

beach, each one breathing out the most terrible threatenings as he ran. Those on board the sloop knew when they had a good thing, and it was not their intention to give it up easily.

Evidently the business had all been arranged beforehand, so that every one knew just what he was expected to do, judging from the precision with which they set to work, Teddy running forward with a hatchet in his hand to cut loose from the anchor rope, while the rest snatched up poles or anything that came handy, and which they could make use of in urging the boat further from the shore.

Taken altogether it was quite a lively time around that region. Maro had also snatched up his pole, and was urging the little boat in the direction of the other, so that he might in some way throw the influence of his firearm into the game; for he knew the temper of those ruffians, and feared for the consequences should they manage to obtain a footing on the sloop.

Bravo now trod his own deck, and was not the man to give up easily when standing up for his

own rights, as defined by the law; and the first pirate who came within range received a most savage thrust from a pole that sent him flat in the water, where he scrambled and splashed and shouted and swore.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFLOAT AND ASHORE.

Then the buccaneers, as Teddy delighted to call the rough spongers, made a combined attack on the sloop, and were met by a vigorous resistance from those who had regained their own. Maro soon saw that he could not get anyway near the scene of the fierce encounter in time to be of assistance; and fearful lest his friends might be overpowered decided it was his duty to send his compliments forward

The gun was loaded with small bird-shot, so that he did not think any serious result would follow; and he did burn to pay back something of the long score he owed those quarrelsome idlers, so he blazed away, aiming low, and while half of the leaden pellets were distributed upon

the surface of the water, the balance found lodgment among the legs of the fellows who pranced around like wild Indians in the little bay. They danced with more violence than ever when thus peppered, and something besides anger began to make itself manifest in their loud bawling. Maro aimed a second time as though about to repeat the warm dose, seeing which they hastened to throw themselves flat in the water, unmindful of the ludicrous look of things, and only caring to shield their precious bodies from another cannonading. Then it was easy for those aboard the sloop to push out of their way, which they proceeded to do.

The discomfited rogues now began to crawl out of the water, and a most ridiculous appearance they presented to be sure. Each had something bitter to say to the others, believing himself to be blameless in the matter; and Maro realized as never before how when rogues fall out honest men get their dues. In this case the sloop was the point at issue, and the odds seemed in favor of the original owner.

Bravo was happy. He did not possess a chivalrous spirit, and thought it his duty as well as pleasure to chaff the defeated Da Gama unmercifully, rubbing in the stings of his misadventure with right good will. The latter was not crushed, and while he scratched vigorously at his stinging lower limbs, he sent back as good as he received.

Our friends appeared to have the upper hand, and yet they were not as cheerful as they might be. For one thing, the memory of that cool spring haunted them, and when Maro heard its praises sung, the poor fellow almost took a fit to think how he had been cheated out of his refreshing drink. They would not dare put out to sea without an effort to fill the cans at least with fresh water. This Bravo vowed by the ghosts of his forefathers, which seemed to be the typical manner of settling a thing, according to the peculiar idea of coast sailors, who, according to the observing Teddy, possessed many of the characteristics of the Chinese, from the inordi-

nate love of tea in any shape down to their worship of ancestors.

It would be a risky move, going ashore in the dark with cans, but Bravo for one declared he was ready to attempt such a move and he soon found ready backers. In fact, their recent success had put new spirit into the three men, and they considered themselves more than a match for the half dozen opposed to them.

Maro doubted the wisdom of such a move, and secretly believed it would pay them to slip away as soon as the breeze moderated, taking their medicine in the shape of stale water like little men until such time as the conditions changed, and they could lay in a fresh supply at some way station, without endangering the success of the expedition; but he was too wise to give these views an airing, knowing that hot-heads would take his caution for cowardice.

The coming of evening found them in this same position; those on the shore had started a fire, and were engaged in cooking fish, the agree-

able odor of which floated out to those prisoners of the sea, just as was intended by the cook.

Da Gama now came down to the edge of the water, holding in his brown hand a handkerchief that was supposed to represent a flag of truce; but the color was suspicious, to say the least, though it answered all right enough.

“Say, you fellers come along ashore and join us at supper. S’pose we all same in the boat, what’s the use of cutting each others’ throats. Plenty fish for all, and we talk about sailing away. Does it go?” was what he bawled as he held his hands up to his mouth, sailor fashion. Now, that appetizing odor of supper was a great temptation to the little company manning the two boats that comprised the fleet, and had Bravo been less intimately acquainted with the captain he might have weakly yielded, to his own undoing; but experience in the past had made him wise, and he understood what deception lay under that seeming friendly invitation from a fellow sailor.

In the same polite and generous manner no

doubt, the spider asked the wretched fly to step in and view his wonderful parlor. But it happened that Bravo was no blue-bottle, and hence he told Da Gama he could keep his blessed supper, and if his language chanced to be a little lurid he might be forgiven, since his face still smarted from the blows which the big Spaniard had rained upon him at their last meeting.

Bravo was not the man to easily forget or forgive; and he knew full well that the other was setting up a little game for them; that once they joined the family circle they could say good-by to the boats, and their chances of emigrating hence.

Having received such a rude rebuff the captain retreated once more to the company of his men, to whom he poured out the bitterness of his woes, as might be judged from the way in which they jumped up from time to time to shake a fist in the direction of the fleet, riding saucily at anchor in the bay.

It was hard to munch away at their frugal fare while that odor from the camp-fire came stealing

to their nostrils; but the heroes are not yet all dead, and they endured even this trial with more or less philosophy, looking hopefully forward to the happy day when a full course dinner might be placed before them. So the night settled down. It was fated to be anything but a season of rest and solitude, with two such rival forces so nearly in touch.

Each envied the other something. Bravo and his followers wanted a share of those sparkling spring waters that had so tickled their jaded taste on the afternoon; while as for Da Gama's crowd, they were nearly ready to imperil their souls in order to regain possession of the captured sloop; for isolation on that uninhabited island failed to have any attractions for them.

Our boys found much to admire in the game which Bravo put up. He was a shrewd old chap, who had cut his eye-teeth long ago, and judging others from his own standpoint, made preparations accordingly. He guessed that Da Gama was desperate enough to make a night attack on the sloop, hoping to catch a weasel asleep, and

as the first move to defeat such a bit of strategy, as soon as the darkness effectually hid their movements, he gave orders to have the anchorage of the vessel changed. They now pushed out further from the shore, which move was rendered possible by the fact that the atmosphere had become very calm, and the sea quieted down wonderfully with the dropping of the wind. The cans which they hoped to fill with water were all placed on the smaller craft, which was intended to be pushed close to the shore when the proper time arrived.

The working force consisted of Bravo, Teddy and the negro Ham; while Maro and the native Conch were left to guard the sloop against any possible assault.

They could see the fire of the buccaneers ashore, and earlier in the evening it had been possible to distinguish their figures as outlined against such a bright background; but latterly they missed this part of the business, which would indicate that the others had either thrown themselves down in a disgusted frame of mind,

to procure a portion of sleep, or else gathered in another quarter, bent upon some desperate errand. Bravo warned those who were left behind to be very careful, for he suspected trouble lay in prospect.

The trio in the little cedar cruiser pushed through the water in the quietest way they knew how, so that hardly a ripple resulted from their passage. Bravo had been a wild-fowler for many years in his native Tar-Heel State, and was acquainted with all the various methods of approaching the ducks and geese frequenting the shallow waters along Currituck sound, so that if any man on earth knew how to propel a boat noiselessly he did. Having located the shore before night set in he knew just where to proceed, and hence valuable time was saved, as well as mistakes avoided. In this manner the expedition drew near land.

Teddy crouching up in the bow of his pet craft, just as he had no doubt done on many another occasion, though never with the same object in view, tried his best to pierce the gloom that hung

like a pall over the junction of sea and shore. Doubtless they would find the coast clear enough, and could make their landing in good order; but the trouble must arise afterward in getting the water aboard.

There was always danger of the cans coming in contact with each other, which sound must of course reach the ears of those near by, and give warning as to the raid, so that they would likely have a swarm of hostiles upon them in quick order. Then there was the boat. It had been brought as close to the beach as policy permitted, and anchored there. This was all very good, but as the little waves came rolling in they persisted in slapping up against the bow and making a gurgling sound that must be instantly recognized by any one accustomed to a life on the water. Still, there is risk in everything, and Bravo did want that spring water the worst kind. He had apportioned the tins one to each man, for it was safer thus, and if the first venture brought favorable results they could do

it again. Under cover of the darkness, therefore, the three crept away.

As Bravo knew his way thoroughly they made no mistake in reaching the spring where each in turn solemnly bent down and imbibed vast quantities of the refreshing fluid, as though it were a part of the ceremony to make sure of that much, anyway. Bravo superintended this operation, as master of ceremonies, and when the third and last tin had been attended to, each gathered up his individual share, with the intention of beating a retreat to the shore, there to exchange the full for empty receptacles.

It was a wretched bit of luck that sent one of the buccaneers to the spring just at this critical moment, a raging, feverish thirst being the motive of his visit; but all the same he stumbled over Teddy as the Canuck lad was in the act of shouldering his load.



IT WAS A SHARK.
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CHAPTER XVIII.

ON GUARD.

In the darkness of night the follower of Da Gama could not see what manner of person it was with whom he came in contact; but he was able to give a pretty fair guess, and knew that the affair called for an investigation.

Accordingly he seized hold of Teddy and began to shout for help, which was just the very thing Bravo objected to; so he flung himself upon the fellow and bore him headlong to the ground, where he immediately began to put into practice certain methods of argument, picked up in a rough-and-tumble life, and which he calculated were apt to induce the chap to keep a still tongue in his head. It was all over within a very brief space of time, and Teddy, who had

temporarily lost his grip on the water-can, was induced to take a fresh start when he found that his tormentor no longer gave evidence of an inclination to bar his way.

The alarm had of course been given, and they could plainly hear the unfortunate roamer's comrades plunging toward the spring, doubtless having guessed what was in the wind.

Although Bravo had thus downed one of their number, and reduced the odds by his valor, it was not a part of his program to stay and invite a general battle. He entertained too much respect for that big Spaniard, and experienced no longing to again try conclusions with him, unless the other were handicapped in some way. Accordingly he gave the word to his two companions, and they put their best foot forward, hoping to reach the boat before the others came up. Burdened with the water cans, their progress could not of necessity be what they might have put forth otherwise; but all the same they developed considerable abilities as sprinters, and managed to reach the beach in fair condition,

though somewhat winded as a result of their rush.

They arrived not an instant too soon, since the quartet was in full pursuit, coming on with the speed of a whirlwind; for it was a serious matter that now confronted the desperadoes, since with a supply of water assured, those who controlled the sailing craft were apt to put to sea and leave them disconsolately in the lurch.

Given a few more seconds and our friends would have been able to have taken their departure with some degree of comfort; but as it was, hearing their adversaries thus bearing down upon them, more or less confusion resulted, each getting in the way of his fellows. The water-cans were dropped into the well of the boat all right, and then came the scramble to follow on the part of the trio, during which time those who led the chase managed to come up.

The giant figure in the van could belong to none other than Da Gama, who, suffering the stings of several successive defeats deemed aggressive tactics the better part of valor, and

without waiting to survey the field waded right in, both figuratively and in reality.

With a tremendous amount of splashing he threw himself upon the *Loon* and endeavored to place a mortgage upon the sailing of the little craft, which was of course just the very thing most dreaded by those who thought to manage the expedition.

Of what use were poles and oars, as opposed to the brute strength of such a Hercules! Captain Vasco had planted himself firmly there, and appeared to be master of the situation. His men were following hot upon his heels and, once they arrived to lend their assistance, the affair must assume the conditions of a farce.

Seeing the folly of pushing and tugging so long as the immovable barrier remained to progress, Bravo started upon another line of argument. He was well versed in all the various methods whereby conviction may be secured even in the most stubborn case, and the manner in which he brought his pole down upon the

cranium of the burly Spaniard was, Teddy thought, truly artistic.

Evidently Bravo managed to bring considerable force into his downward stroke, if it was delivered in a hurry, for immediately there ensued a vast amount of splashing in the water, and when Teddy gave a desperate push with his pole he found that the boat was free to move away, Da Gama having relinquished his grip, as any man so sorely stricken might well do. Gladly they pushed away from the scene of disturbance.

That the captain was not drowned or even seriously injured beyond that temporary stroke of paralysis, they presently had strong evidence when they heard his bull-like voice raised in denouncing his laggard crew for not having been on hand when most needed.

Teddy hoped they had seen the last of the ruffian; but so long as they were forced from one cause or another to remain within biscuit-toss of the shore where he held forth, he knew there must be a constant fear of further efforts

on the part of the Spaniard looking toward reprisals; for he was in a fine humor to cut their throats, or do something equally brutal, if so be the fortunes of war would only turn the tables for a brief spell.

In the darkness they could not immediately find the other boat, for Maro, hearing the signs of trouble, had seen fit to change the sloop's anchorage. However, a hail across the water eventually took them in the right quarter, and the two forces were once again united.

The loud voices ashore had now ceased. Perhaps the disconsolate Da Gama was having his bruised head bandaged; or else, acting on the homeopathic principle that "like is cured by like," he may have been cudgeling his brains in the endeavor to suggest a way whereby long-delayed victory might be obtained over those who held the fort so valiantly.

Really this was a most extraordinary termination to the adventure of being cast away on a sand-key; and yet Teddy remembered that Robinson Crusoe after leaving his famous island,

went through with some astonishing mishaps while traveling overland, being chased by wolves and attacked by bands of murderous desert Tartars. No doubt it was all in the game, and according to the book. All he wished now was that the breeze would spring up from some quarter, the east preferred, and allow them to sail away from this dangerous community, where a savage old pirate schemed toward their undoing.

No one thought of sleep, though they found plenty of room now in which to stretch themselves out, should the notion come, for the three manned the sloop while the boys had possession of their own craft.

Maro treated himself to sundry swigs at the water-can, and announced his appreciation of the draft in language quite as fervent as the occasion seemed to call for. Indeed, he declared it the sweetest liquid refreshment that had ever passed his lips, which could of course be taken with a grain of allowance, considering his famished condition at the time.

Ever and anon they turned anxious eyes to-

ward the shore, wondering what their enemies might be doing. The darkness screened everything so fully that it was utterly impossible to see a single object.

Several times the boys thought they heard voices, but could not make sure, since it might have been some bird of the night, or possibly a frog, if such inhabited this island of the salty seas. What they had seen of the Spaniard had convinced them that he was a man who hated to give up any cherished object, and especially if it concerned his future welfare; so according to their minds the reverses which Da Gama had already received, instead of chastening him were apt to arouse the fighting blood to its utmost limit.

Would they swim out to assail those on the boats? Remembering what manner of sharks inhabited the waters, Teddy was inclined to doubt this, though he realized how such a possible peril might not daunt a man as desperate as the buccaneer chief. He had his gun within reach of his hand all the time, and Maro did not

neglect to keep a pole close by, with which he hoped to push the light craft out of danger should trouble spring upon them, rather than use it as a weapon of offense, after the manner suggested by Bravo's treatment of the captain.

It wore on toward midnight. The stars glowed in the clear heavens and the gurgling sound of lapping waves along the beach told of the calm that rested upon the late turbulent sea.

Teddy confessed to feeling sleepy enough by this time, and thought it might be the part of wisdom to divide the watches, each securing some rest by turns. Accordingly it was so arranged, and Maro who declared he had never been more wideawake in his life, insisted upon taking the first trick as guardian of the little craft. So Teddy made as comfortable a bed as the occasion allowed, having turned his shotgun over to the guard, and in less than three minutes after his head struck the rude pillow he was fast asleep.

Maro sat there with his face turned toward

the shore, and keenly on the alert for signs of trouble. Now and then he heard a movement aboard the sloop, which he could see close by, and from this he understood that Bravo was not deluding himself with the idea that further trouble was impossible.

Occasionally some fish jumped out of the water with a splash, and Maro wondered if these might not be the jumping mullet of whose acrobatic qualities he had heard and read so much in connection with accounts of Florida experiences. And once there was a sudden rush in the water as a shark pounced upon his prey. Maro, thinking the long-expected surprise was coming, made a move with the gun, but recognized the probable cause of the disturbance in time to stay his hand; while Teddy slumbered through it all, in blissful unconsciousness of the racket. Oh! for a puff of air, to indicate that the breeze really meant to favor them; but an hour or more crept by, and everything was as dead as dead could be, and it would appear that

until dawn came they might not expect any change. There were nine chances out of ten that it would come when the sun rose above the horizon, as Maro well knew, he being in close touch with the eccentricities of the weather as found along the coast.

When the boys suspected that the Spanish captain was plotting further trouble they were not far wrong, for a man of his passions could not admit himself defeated so long as a single chance remained whereby conditions could be altered. He considered no difficulties too severe if by undertaking some project he might find an opportunity to eventually win out. Thus it came to pass that the discovery of some timber that had been washed ashore from the wreck of a lumber vessel suggested an idea which by degrees he and his henchmen were putting into practice, taking their time and working with extreme caution in order not to give the alarm. Besides, with the cunning that has ever marked those of his breed, Da Gama knew how the still,

small hours of the early morning are better suited for an attack than any other time, since men at such times are more apt to be overcome by the drowsy god of slumber.

CHAPTER XIX.

WELL WON.

History repeats itself, they say, and surely it seemed as though it did so in this case; for the old story of the Spanish armada starting out to overwhelm the English fleet was copied on a small scale, when Da Gama and his band each mounted a log which was to serve in lieu of a boat, and with rude paddles ventured upon the bosom of the bay, heading in the quarter where they judged the sloop, together with her smaller attendant craft, lay anchored.

No doubt the spectacle would have been highly entertaining could one have looked upon it by daylight, for sailors that they were the six chaps straddled their logs as though they were so many tricky horses; and every one knows how

clumsy Jack is when he attempts to navigate ashore on the back of four-footed deceptions. Still, the main thing was to make progress and this they did after their fashion, trusting to luck that any splash made in the manipulation of their clumsy craft would, if heard, be laid at the door of the frisky mullet in the shallows. The English fleet lay in darkness, but as the sloop was painted white, her location would be betrayed when they arrived within a certain distance of her anchorage.

Da Gama proved himself no mean commander when it came to strategy, for he had arranged matters with his men whereby they could concentrate their full force upon the sloop, which appeared to be the object of their ambition.

If the watch aboard the sponger saw the moving logs at all he possibly considered them as beneath his notice, believing them to be some species of fish or aquatic reptiles such as alligators, for he gave no sign of warning until the logs had been pushed up alongside. His sudden shout of discovery rang over the water, and was

immediately followed by a roar from the leathern lungs of Da Gama, as he dipped his paddle in deeply and sent his unique craft slam up against the side of the sloop.

That was a warm time afloat, with six lusty fellows bellowing as they attempted to board the boat, and three equally determined mariners trying their best to prevent such an accomplishment.

No wonder Teddy woke up suddenly and scrambled to his feet, under the impression that he was a Turk at the time Bozarris and his valiant Greeks fell upon the sleeping camp. He snatched up the pole and stood on the defensive, really believing the attack was intended for them.

“Push over to help Bravo!” shouted Maro, on the spur of the moment.

It would have been natural for them to have considered the affair was none of their business, and to have remained passive spectators while it was being decided one way or the other; but both of them had settled this matter when talking

over the possibilities ahead, and it was decided that should their companions be the objects of Da Gama's attack, it would be their duty to lend a hand. Teddy pushed for all he was worth, and by degrees the cedar boat progressed toward the other, around which the fighting was going on.

They were having a high old time of it, judging from the tremendous amount of splashing and shouting that served to make things lively; but it was of course impossible to tell which side seemed to be getting the upper hand.

Maro crouched in the bow of the *Loon*, holding his gun in readiness for immediate use, but unwilling to fire while the chances of hitting friends was equal to that of disabling foes. It seemed really too bad that these fellows should be engaging in this miserable warfare, when, as comrades in misfortune, they should have combined their energies with the one idea of working out their salvation, by reaching some friendly port; yet such is the pugnacious nature of their class that they could engage in this bitter

feud even while facing distressing conditions.

Maro was simply disgusted, but he knew that so long as Da Gama controlled the other side nothing could be done to bring about peace.

He listened intently, hoping to discover how the affair was proceeding so that they might govern their own actions accordingly. If Bravo and his fellows were already overcome, it would be the height of folly for the two boys to attempt a rescue, and under such conditions the best they could do would be to sheer off and escape while the chance remained. As the roar of battle continued unabated, he was forced to believe that Bravo managed to hold his own, and this inclined him to allow Teddy to keep up his efforts with the setting-pole.

They were now close upon the scene of riot, and Maro could begin to make out something of what was taking place upon the deck of the sponger. He could see that those who held the fort were rushing like mad this way and that, making vicious jabs at the would-be boarders, who, knocked again and again into the water,

only continued to clamber up again, dripping with brine, in the endeavor to effect a permanent lodgment on the deck. Salt water evidently had little terror for them, now that their fighting blood had been aroused, and they took these immersions as a part of the game, hoping sooner or later to weary those who did the pushing, and forcing their unwelcome presence on board. This was the condition of things when our boys came upon the scene.

Maro did not want to use his gun, for at such a short distance the effect would be as serious as the discharge of a cannon; and while he had roughed it more or less during some of the later years of his existence, he certainly did not wish to take human life if it could possibly be avoided. Accordingly he, too, armed himself with a pole and began to slash the water at a furious rate, intending to rain his blows upon some wretched piratical chap when another push from the energetic Teddy shortened the distance separating the two boats. In this respect he could not ex-

perience any scruples, since these men certainly deserved all that was coming to them.

When the two lads got into concerted action they created something of a little panic among the ambitious and amphibious buccaneers, who speedily deserted that side of the sloop for the other, where they might at least expect blows from only one quarter.

How the affair might have worked out had matters remained in this condition it would be hard to say, since both sides exhibited a certain bulldog tenacity of purpose. It chanced, however, that new elements cropped up to change the situation. Teddy was the first to discover the fact that while they worked their way in the direction of the sloop, the long expected breeze had swung in upon them, and that it had already fluttered along the surface of the water, causing more than a ripple. And as luck would have it this new wind came out of a quarter favorable for any ambition they might encourage. With a sail set it would soon bear them away from the

rival crews, and out past the point of land, beyond which lay the broad ocean.

Thus an inspiration flashed athwart the bright mind of the New England boy, and he hastened to shout at his chum: "A breeze! Up with our sail, Teddy, while I fasten on to the sloop, and we'll tow 'em out to sea!"

While the young Canadian might well be astonished at the brilliancy of this sudden conceit, he was able to grasp its strong qualities and started immediately to carry out his share in his usual buoyant manner.

Next Maro turned his attention to those aboard the sponger. "Ahoy, Bravo!" he shouted, and his shrill treble was heard above the harsh roar of battle, so that the other made answer.

"Hello, hello!" he bawled, "what luck, lad?"

"Cut loose from your anchor—we're going out to sea!" was what the boy called, repeating it several times as he crouched down and secured a rope, so that the two boats were attached, stern to stern. Little did the incongruity of the

thing matter just then, their one ambition being to get away.

Doubtless what he shouted was also heard by the buccaneers, and with something like consternation, for they must have realized that such a move if successfully carried out meant ruin to all their hopes and ambitions; so that they endeavored more than ever to come aboard, and stay after they got there. Teddy had meanwhile succeeded in dragging the forlorn sail into place, and as the first puff of wind struck in they actually began to move through the water, showing that some one must have obeyed Maro's injunction to sever the rope that held the sloop to her anchor. A start having thus been made their progress began to become more and more apparent, and presently it was so pronounced that none might fail to understand how conditions had changed.

Black despair now seized upon the assailants. Recognizing the fact that defeat stared them in the face, and that they would probably be left behind on the island, they began to alter their

tune and beg for quarter, declaring that they were ready to give up the fight, and that the victorious crew could hold them as prisoners if they chose; but such was the confusion that their piteous plea was not fully understood, so that Bravo and his gang continued to cheerfully knock them overboard again and again as fast as they bobbed up; and all the while the sloop was being dragged toward the open sea.

One by one the wretched buccaneers fell away, afraid lest they be taken outside and left to perish. The sound of the battle gradually ceased, and by the time they had arrived opposite the edge of the point the last of the marauders had given up the fight, and was making desperately for the shore on his clumsy log float. It had been a tough experience all around, and none of them were sorry to believe they had seen the last of the desperate ruffians.

A stay was made to correct the position of the sloop, and once she changed her front with sail thrown to the breeze she assumed the lead, as became her larger spread of canvas. The is-

land was blotted out of sight, but they could imagine what a bedraggled and furious group of men was gathered on the beach, as the members of the expedition that failed to accomplish its object crawled out of the water one by one.

Our lads had now entered on another phase of their adventures, with everything seeming to favor their speedy return to the haunts of civilization. The wind remained fitful throughout the balance of the night, now favoring them, and then dying utterly away; but they did not complain, since its coming in just the nick of time had saved the day, and they felt as though they could afford to wait until morning for a fresh breeze.

They marked out their course by the stars and managed to keep within hailing distance of each other while darkness lasted. Bravo may have had his poor qualities, but deserting those who had been able to do him a friendly turn did not appear to belong to the list. When the dawn came at last, Teddy with his apology for a glass took an observation, and announced that he could

distinctly see the island that had been the scene of their recent adventures; and he also declared that a column of black smoke rose in the air above it, as though those marooned spirits who had been left behind against their will hoped to thus attract the attention of some passing ship.

With the freshening wind they set their course anew, and headed in that quarter whence they hoped and expected to find a harbor. Provisions were at a premium, and they could not stand the strain of a long voyage in their present condition, so that one and all fervently hoped the anticipated haven would speedily show up.

CHAPTER XX.

MARO MEETS THE SKIPPER AGAIN.

Throughout the whole day they continued to make fair progress in the direction their course had been set. Twice they sighted distant sails, showing that they were now more in the track of trading vessels; and once a steamer loomed up, heading in the direction of the States, possibly some fruit vessel going north laden with bananas or cocoanuts.

As evening came on they drew near a schooner and made signals of distress; seeing which those on board the schooner immediately bore down upon them, and came up into the wind, calling to them to draw alongside and tell their story. This they did after a fashion, though the boys made no attempt to explain the whys and where-

fores of their being present; and the sailors who lined the side of the schooner, dark-faced natives most of them, stared at the saucy little cedar cruiser as though they considered a fellow must be out of his mind to risk his life in such a frail cockle-shell. Teddy had his own opinion about that same thing, and such was his sublime confidence in the indestructible *Loon* that he would willingly have taken chances in her when the seas were great enough to have swamped Bravo's sloop.

Their necessities appealed to the captain of the schooner, who willingly spared them some ship biscuit and what else he could find aboard, though as usual there was little variety in his grub-list. Teddy insisted upon his taking pay for the same, though the honest skipper would have donated it just as willingly, for men in his line have a fellow sympathy for any one in distress. They have knocked about on the sea so long, and experienced so many hardships, owing to the whims of the mighty ocean, that a fellow-feeling possesses them whenever there is an ap-

peal for help. Tramps are few and far between on the ocean highway, and there is small chance for a man's natural generosity to be displayed.

Our friends continued their cruise with happier hearts, for not only had they been made the recipients of the skipper's bounty, in the way of food, but he had given them their course, by following which they would arrive ere long at San Juan, on the northern coast of Porto Rico, where under the protecting flag of the United States they would be apt to receive a kindly welcome, as do all shipwrecked mariners.

The wind increased in force with the falling of night's shades, and lest the two boats become separated in the darkness, our boys went aboard the sloop, after which the *Loon* was taken in tow, at the end of a short line. Being without ballast she rode the waves like a cork, and Teddy had faith to believe she would remain with them to the finish. By this time they were accustomed to taking whatever the weather clerk chose to hand out, and under reduced sail kept as straight

a course as was possible through the lonely vigils of the night.

The boys stood their turn at the wheel, and little sleep was secured by any one on board, for there were times when prompt action was needed with the handling of the craft in order to avoid disaster, so suddenly did squalls rush down upon them. Clouds scurried across the sky, and there were all the signs of a gathering storm; but many times these prophets of evil show themselves without results, and so none of our little company borrowed trouble on this account.

Toward morning the sea had risen to tremendous heights, and Teddy was in great distress of mind over his pet craft, for it seemed as though at times her fierce lunges must surely snap the cable, or else tear out the ring-bolt in her bow to which the rope was attached. Again and again he hovered over the cleat to which the other end of the cable was secured, easing the strain after a fashion, and tenderly watching the frantic plunges which the captive cruiser made

in following the lead of her larger companion. And while he was thus bending down, a billow larger than any that had as yet battered against the sloop, came sweeping down, slapping against her counter and rising to overwhelm her deck with a flood of green waters. Teddy, being but a fresh-water sailor, knew not this ancient trick of the sea, so that he was caught napping and would have gone overboard in a smother of yeasty foam had not a black muscular arm shot out and pinned him fast, the owner of said arm being securely anchored with his other hand through the iron to which the block of the sheet was secured.

It was Ham who thus prevented the young Canadian from going overboard, and as Teddy regained his footing on the slippery deck, it was not strange that as he gazed into that ebony countenance, now grinning from ear to ear with delight, he should forget that he had ever called it a villainous phiz, and one he could never trust. He had learned a lesson, such as may be taught only by experience.

That same billow had loosened the fastenings of the *Loon*, and the venturesome cedar craft manifested a disposition to go upon another lone voyage; but Teddy saw the danger and sprang to the rescue, adjusting new ropes ere another wave smothered the sloop. This held out, and the *Loon* concluded to stick to the sponger, which solution of the problem pleased Teddy quite a bit.

The same wave had come near foundering the sloop, and every member of her crew was now on deck, ready to join in the fight for life.

They saw the approach of a second night with more or less apprehension, for who could tell what its hours of gloom might have in store for them? Bad as it was to fight the storm-king while daylight lasted, it was far more desperate under the canopy of night, when a pall hid everything from view, and eternal vigilance was the price of safety. It was a bad night for them all, even though a number of like experiences had of late been crowded upon them. The wind held high carnival hour after hour and the sea

grew absolutely fearful in its toppling waves, that appeared to tower above the little vessel as though threatening to crush her under the weight of their displeasure; yet she was a splendid seaworthy boat, and threw the tons upon tons of green water from her as she rose again, just as a Newfoundland dog would shake the drops from his hide upon emerging from the water. With joy they greeted the first streaks of dawn, hoping its coming would bring them some new reason for hope, since the terror of darkness was wearing upon them fearfully.

Then what shouts went up as Teddy made the discovery that they were within sight not only of land, but of a harbor where ships rode out the storm! And what a thrill of delight the boys experienced when their eyes once more beheld the blessed stars and stripes of Old Glory floating in the breeze over the ramparts of San Juan, once a stronghold of Spanish power in the West Indies, but now an outlying section of the great Republic to the north! Truly their long series of troubles must be at an end, and they could

cast anchor in peaceful waters. The trials and tribulations of the past faded from their minds, and they remembered only that the future held out hope.

It mattered little to Bravo where he turned up, since he still held possession of his sloop, and could engage in his favorite business, next to treasure-seeking, that of hunting sponges for the market.,

As to the men who had been left on the island, the skipper bothered his head not a whit, and so far as he was concerned they might have lived the balance of their lives in seclusion. Maro had not been brought up that way, and felt it to be his duty to report the circumstances to the proper authorities at his first opportunity, leaving to them the task of attempting the rescue of the marooned ones.

The boys went ashore at the first chance, for they were naturally eager to see what sort of a place the capital of Porto Rico might be. Both had heard much about its attractions, but this was not seeing for themselves. And it was fine

to step on solid ground, with the knowledge that the comforts of civilization surrounded one, that for an exchange of coin he could secure almost anything imaginable in the way of food.

Perhaps it is only natural, and certainly excusable, that shipwrecked mariners, upon finding themselves in a port of safety, should allow their thoughts to dwell principally upon the delights of satisfying the appetite, since custom has made civilized man a slave to the good things of the table. Luckily Teddy was well supplied with money, which he had sewed in the lining of his coat, and the presence of which was never for a moment suspected by those rough companions of his adventurous cruise; else it might have tempted Da Gama as a means of partially satisfying the disappointment caused by his failure to unearth treasure.

Teddy was liberal to the tips of his fingers and insisted on his chum sharing his possessions. They left the *Loon* in the hands of a native boatman, who guaranteed to make the little craft as good as new inside of two days; and Teddy was

already laying out a campaign for himself and friend along the Indian river section of coast-wise Florida, when the cedar boat that had already served the Canadian lad so faithfully in his long cruise from the land of ice and snow would be their home for some months.

It had been arranged that Maro should not notify his uncle concerning his escape from the sea. He could lie low all winter, and when the approach of warm weather drove the boys north it would be time enough then to surprise Uncle Simon, who would no doubt be vastly pleased to learn that his bugbear of a scapegrace nephew had survived, to remain a stumbling block between himself and that rich property which he coveted. The fruit to be purchased, as well as the beef from which they had been deprived so long; how they gloried in these things! Why, the earth seemed beautiful enough to be called a paradise, and they felt at peace with all men.

But, before night set in Maro was made the recipient of a shock that took away some of the pleasure of living, and he realized that after all

this old world may seem very small. This condition of mind resulted from an accidental meeting on the plaza with a man whom he had good reason to remember, being none other than Captain Clawson, of the ill-fated *Nancy Lee*. Apparently the boats had managed to run across some rescuing craft, and eventually the evil skipper had turned up in San Juan, where he might be taking life easy while waiting to receive a remittance from that same artful schemer, Uncle Simon.

Captain Clawson was certainly the more astonished, for he had not the least idea in the world that the boy was in the land of the living, after his miserable trick of locking him in his stateroom on board the supposed sinking vessel. He turned a sickly color, and his eyes seemed to fairly pop out of their sockets, for all mariners are inclined toward superstition, and Clawson was no exception. Had Maro made any extraordinary manifestation, such as spirits are supposed to show, the other would probably have turned and fled from the spot; but Maro had no

idea of playing ghost, and turned a very indignant face upon his old enemy.

“Well,” he said, looking the other in the eye, “this is a more agreeable meeting than our last one, Captain. Don’t think I’m a ghost come to haunt you. The old *Nancy Lee* didn’t go down as soon as you calculated, when you bored those holes in her bottom in order to get the insurance money, and you see I managed to escape.”

Captain Clawson tried to bluff it out, as his best resort.

“Boy, I’m mighty glad to see you. I’ve been sorry ever since that I let the men hurry me into that boat, without casting around to find what had become of you. That’s gospel truth I’m tellin’ whether you believe it or not. And as to my borin’ holes, you’re mistaken, Maro. I ain’t that kind of man. I’m just a-waitin’ for your uncle to send money to get us home; and if so be I can do anything for you, say the word.”

Though he spoke so smoothly Maro was not in the least deceived, for he knew the skipper of old, and seeing the glitter in his eye that told

of slumbering passion, knew how Clawson would be only too well pleased to find an opportunity in the near future, whereby he could in some other way carry out his instructions from the man to whom he had sold himself, soul and body.

“I ask no favors from you, and I want to see nothing more of you. If you trouble me the least bit, I’ve arranged to tell my whole story to the Governor of Porto Rico, who will find a place for such as you. So, on the whole, it would be wise for you to sheer off and leave me alone. If you do I promise not to bother you—that’s all.” Then Maro turned his back deliberately on the old tar, and stalked away, leaving an angry man on the square.

Perhaps Maro may have taken the wisest course to tie the hands of the skipper, who had a certain amount of respect for the law. But should the occasion ever arise to give the late captain of the *Nancy Lee* another chance to do him an ill turn, Clawson was in a humor to put his whole soul into the work; for to be treated so contemptuously by a mere boy, and one whom

he had abused on board ship at that, was galling to the scoundrelly sailor's pride.

When Teddy heard about the encounter he was uneasy, for he had come to feel very warmly toward this new-found chum, and would have experienced considerable distress should anything have happened to Maro. He fancied that the captain would plan evil things, and that the sooner they got away from San Juan the better.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW THEY SAILED FROM SAN JUAN.

It was determined to find out early the next morning when a steamer left for some port in the States, though Teddy did not like the idea of traveling back north, after fighting his way down the coast in his little cruiser. Perhaps, he suggested, they might run across some sailing vessel that was bound for Havana, on board of which the *Loon* might be shipped, with themselves as passengers. Once at the Cuban capital they could re-embark on a small steamer that plied between that port and Miami on Biscayne bay in Florida, where their winter could be put in with the mysterious Everglades within reach, filled with opportunities for adventure and exploration, such as must appeal to such a lover of outdoor life as the young Canadian.

They had put up at a hotel which was recommended by Bravo, who had been in San Juan before, and where they were decently treated, so far as food and lodgings went, though Teddy thought things might have been a bit cleaner, to suit his taste. While the music in the plaza was attractive, and the spectacle of the moving crowds appealed to their sympathies, neither of the boys thought it just wise to mingle with the various groups. Teddy was still uneasy concerning the vindictive skipper, and manufactured all manner of possible dangers that might arise through his desire to please his unscrupulous employer. It is not every boy in these prosaic days who can run across a real romance such as clung about the fortunes of Maro, and the Canadian lad thought it his duty to make as much out of it as possible.

They had a balcony in front of their room which was in the second story of the hotel facing the square, and by taking chairs outside they could hear the band play, and look down on the crowd without being compelled to rub elbows

with them; which Teddy thought was a capital thing, since he had read much concerning the love which all who inherit Spanish blood have for the stealthy use of the knife, as a means of redressing fancied wrongs.

Perhaps he was right after all. Maro was inclined to believe so when, later in the evening, his attention was directed toward the dark figure of a man who had halted in the shadow of a building, and appeared to be eagerly watching the hotel. He had an idea this was Captain Clawson, and when Teddy had his attention directed toward the same quarter he agreed with him. They watched without allowing the other to see them, and became convinced that the skipper had certain evil designs upon them, or else he would never have gone to such trouble.

Teddy was for changing their quarters at once, but the other succeeded in laughing this notion down. While San Juan might not be so safe a place as Boston, still under the shelter of the hotel they ought to find a fair measure of security. All they had to do was to remain in se-

clusion while darkness lasted, and hasten their departure on the following day, no matter as to whether the boat's repairs had been completed or not. Anything in that line could be carried out at Miami just as well, without their assuming the risk that seemed to cover a further sojourn in the Porto Rico capital.

They double-fastened their doors that night. Indeed, Teddy was so nervous over the affair he proposed sitting up with the gun at hand, ready to repel boarders; but his friend made fun of such a move, and calmed his anticipations of trouble. Several times during the night Teddy popped up in bed, and appeared to be listening intently to certain sounds that came from without, and which perhaps in his present highly excited state of mind seemed suspicious to him. Once he even crawled out of bed and slipped over to the window, under the impression that he had heard some one climbing up on that balcony where he and Maro spent the evening; but investigation did not reveal the shadowy figure of a would-be kidnapper, and Teddy was fain to

seek his couch again to doze, and dream of desperate conflicts with the rough sailormen who worked under the skipper.

Perhaps something could be laid to the fact that while cruising the lad had accustomed himself to waking several times during the night, to see if his boat was safe, or the fire burning. Habit is strong in such cases, even when the roof of a friendly caravansary shelters one instead of the canopy of heaven.

Maro was himself sleeping lightly. This thing of a genuine bed seemed wholly out of place after the rough experiences of the last portion of his life, and one would have to become accustomed to such a luxury by degrees. So he knew something of Teddy's uneasiness, and secretly chuckled under the covers, which were scanty enough as became a warm climate, though not saying a word at the time. That would do to keep and toss at his friend when he wanted an excuse for teasing him. At any rate, both of the boys were glad enough to see the morning light, and hoped that before another evening they

might be away from noisy San Juan, with its music-loving population; away from the skipper of the *Nancy Lee*, and free from his plottings.

Immediately after breakfast they set out to make a tour of the docks, asking about vessels that were about to sail shortly. Their journey resulted in but one positive find, and when the balance was struck it was decided to avail themselves of this opportunity to get away.

A schooner named the *Pompano* was loading for Havana, and expected to sail before dark. Arrangements were made with her captain to convey the little cruiser on deck to the Cuban capital, as well as both boys as passengers.

After lunch they settled their account at the hotel. It was not difficult to carry their luggage, since they had made only a few necessary purchases, and these were soon deposited in the little snugery on board the *Pompano* which was to be their very own during the cruise across the wide stretch of water.

Then came the task of conveying the boat. The man to whom had been given the job of re-

pairing the same had not even touched his work, after the usual procrastinating manner of Spaniards, though he did not hesitate to spend the advance money which he had demanded and received when accepting the conditions. For this latter Teddy cared little, but he did stand up for his rights when the fellow tried to make him pay the full amount; and it required a threat from Maro to call the police, before he consented to accept another small payment and waive his rights; anything rather than have trouble, with a consequent delay in getting away. A mule and a cart managed to convey the boat to the landing, and our boys drew a breath of relief when they saw the cedar craft safely lodged on the deck of the schooner, lashed to prevent such a catastrophe as its being washed overboard by some mischievous billow.

Going aboard they anxiously waited for the vessel to get under way, but evening came on with men still hustling to complete the cargo. They ate supper aboard and made no complaint, though the character of the food was not such as

to arouse enthusiasm, even with lads who had of late been cast upon a sand-key in the Caribbean.

“They’re making ready to cast off!” announced Maro, about the time they finished their meal; whereupon Teddy sprang out of the cabin and rushed on deck, to ascertain if the good news were true.

He found it to be so, since the last line had been brought aboard, and they were moving slowly from the dock, the tide carrying the schooner into the harbor. Dark-faced sailors were hoisting sails and altogether there seemed an air of bustle that was exceedingly pleasing to the Canadian lad. When finally the wind filled their sails, and they began to actually leave the city astern, our young adventurers felt like giving a genuine shout of pleasure, for it seemed as though their troubles all lay in the shadowy past, and that the future appeared rosy with hope, and the promise of pleasures dear to the boyish heart.

They were weary and did not remain long on deck, though while the lights of San Juan flick-

ered in the distance Maro could not tear himself away. Teddy must take a last look at the cruiser on deck, as if to assure himself that it was still safe, and then he prepared to follow his friend below.

He found Maro troubled. "What's the matter—not sick with this little roughness, I hope?" he said, as soon as he caught sight of his friend's face.

"Such miserable luck!" exclaimed Maro, in a disgusted tone.

"What's up now?"

"Oh, he's aboard, that's all," sighed the New England boy, and it was evident that there could be but one person coming under that head with Teddy, for he immediately jumped to a conclusion.

"You don't mean Captain Clawson?"

"Yes, I do—met him right on the companion-way, when I was coming down here—just as big as life, and so surprised to see me he nearly fell over."

"That settles it—we're in for war," an-

nounced Teddy, making a dive for the corner of the little den where he had deposited his shotgun.

CHAPTER XXII.

CAMPING AND CRUISING IN FLORIDA.

This impulsive movement on the part of Teddy caused his friend to smile again, and so he forgot a portion of his troubles. "The door has a lock, so don't think he's going to break in on us. And I'm sure the look of disgust he gave me was real, so I imagine the old skipper is even more discouraged at finding us aboard than we can feel at seeing him," remarked Maro, laughingly.

Teddy became reassured, and condescended, now that he had the gun where he could lay hands on it, to talk over the case reasonably.

"What d'ye suppose brings him aboard the *Pompano*, if not to get you for that blessed old uncle ?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know for certain, you see, but

I can give a pretty close guess, and I imagine the old chap's badly rattled over the way things have gone with his miserable business. Perhaps he thought we meant to denounce him to Governor Hunt and have him locked up on the charge of trying to make way with me. That's what we ought to have done, I guess, though I hated to think of staying there to accuse the villain in court. The question that interests us is, what will he try to do, now that he finds that we are bound for the same port as himself ? ”

“But that's a foreign territory, you know, and he needn't have the same fear as at San Juan, where the laws of the United States prevail. We must be wide awake, and not give him any chance to work us any ill. And above all things see to it that you keep away from the rail when on board, and especially at night, for d'ye know, I imagine from the character you've given this angelic cherub that he'd like nothing better than to push you overboard, under the plea that you owed Davy Jones something for having cheated him before.”

So they canvassed the situation this way and that, and agreed on a plan of campaign that held out fair promises. The skipper must be kept under their eye while the cruise lasted and given to understand that they did not mean to allow any foolishness; that the first movement on his part looking to treachery was to bring a storm upon his head that would be exceedingly unpleasant.

At any rate the presence of the skipper of the lost *Nancy Lee* had the effect of destroying what pleasure they might have taken in the voyage, which they now prayed might be as brief as possible. The next morning they found the schooner bowling along under a full spread of canvas, and with a lumpy sea; but both boys were fair sailors, and this sort of thing possessed a certain amount of charm for them; if only that ogre were absent.

The skipper avoided them all day, though he came to his meals, sitting at the other end of the table, and joining in the general conversation. He was plainly ill at ease, and Teddy did not

know whether this came from his fear of future trouble because of what he had done, or that he contemplated further desperate tactics.

Maro meanwhile was making up his mind to beard the tiger in his lair, and lay the ghost that haunted them. In other words he made it a point to join the skipper the very next time he saw him on deck, and force him into conversation, showing him how it would be twice as profitable to come over to the side of one against whom he had been plotting; how Uncle Simon was sure to turn upon him sooner or later, and cast him off without reward. He found a ready listener, for Captain Clawson, while not suffering very much from remorse on account of his evil deeds, realized that what the boy spoke was true, every word of it, and he eagerly grasped this chance to pull out of a nasty hole with a sound craft.

“I agree to all you say, lad, and if you promise to pay me double what he said he would, after you get your money I mean, of course, I’ll stand by ye and make old Simon squeal pretty

lively. I owe him a pretty lot on account of past things, where he's squeezed me hard. Is it a go, Maro?" he asked eagerly.

The boy despised a treacherous nature, but he had enough of the lawyer in him to see just how his case might be profited by such a turncoat. When thieves fall out honest men get their due, and he meant to call his scheming relative to book when once more in the North. It was time the estate was put in the hands of responsible trustees who would manage it with an eye single to the benefit of the owner, and not with an idea of some time coming into possession themselves, as was the case with Uncle Simon. So peace was patched up between those who had eyed each other askance. Maro could sleep more comfortably, while as for the skipper, he need not anticipate trouble when they cast anchor in Havana harbor.

Nevertheless that cautious Teddy would not hear of his friend being on deck after dark, but insisted on accompanying him constantly, patrolling the scanty promenade and sitting along-

side the *Loon*, where the owner might run his hand caressingly along the smooth side of the jaunty craft that held his affection, even as the Arab of the sandy desert loves his proud and faithful steed. He did not believe the leopard could change his spots, and hence, in his mind the Yankee skipper must always be associated with plots and schemes, so that his most innocent movement had a dark meaning back of it.

Teddy frankly admitted that such a feeling toward a repentant sinner was far from charitable, but then he declared it would have made considerable difference with him had the captain really and truly expressed sorrow for his misdeeds, and a desire to turn over a new leaf. As it was he only changed his cards through policy, and in the hope of bettering himself financially, as well as avoiding unpleasant consequences on account of his underhand treatment of Maro.

The weather interested them considerably, as it must all who take a sea voyage in sub-tropical latitudes, where sudden storms are an ever-present possibility, and hurricanes not unknown.

Surely they had seen enough stress of weather, and deserved some pleasant sailing for a change; and it seemed as though Old Boreas must be of the same mind, wearied of persecuting these young voyagers, for day after day the breeze held favorable, now dying away to a mere zephyr, and then bursting out in sturdy puffs that brought about a sudden shortening of sail, lest they meet with mishap, but ever in a favoring quarter, and wafting the argosy toward the shores of the new Cuban republic that was fostered by the arm of Uncle Sam.

If Captain Clawson had contemplated any more treachery, he lacked either the ability or the nerve to attempt it, for while the journey lasted he was suave and polite, offering no cause for suspicion; nor was Maro at all afraid to remain alone on deck, though his comrade would persist in hovering near at such times, ready to throw himself into the breach should the occasion call for such energetic action.

When, after skirting the northern shore of Cuba, they finally came in sight of grim Morro

Castle, guarding the harbor as in the days when the red and yellow banner of old Spain fluttered from the staff, our pilgrims were ready to breathe a sigh of relief, for they knew Maro's native land now lay but a night's sailing beyond. "I'll be mighty glad to step on the old soil again," said Maro, just as though he had been absent for years instead of weeks; but as one contemplates the variety of adventures through which fortune had led them, it does not seem so surprising that they should feel this way, for really they had lived years since the time when Teddy boarded the derelict and found Maro fastened in his hole, a prisoner.

It was daylight still when they sailed past the fort, and came in sight of the wreck of the *Maine*, that mute monument to the valor of American soldiers. Teddy felt as though he might be called as much of a Yankee as the next one, a cousin at the very least; and he surveyed that projecting mass of twisted steel with almost as holy emotions as his comrade, to the manor born.

They did not wish to go ashore until the morning, though Clawson was away as soon as the schooner tied up to a floating buoy; possibly because he feared lest Maro meant to cage him, and that all his promises were empty words; for men who hold their own vows lightly are very apt to ascribe the same lack of honor to their fellows.

No one was sorry to see him go, and he had given directions where a letter would always find him, when the time came that his evidence would be needed in order to scare Uncle Simon into relinquishing his greedy grip on the young fellow's property.

It was something of a treat to sit on deck and survey that wonder city with its myriad lights, pondering on what strange things had happened there within the last few years. Long the boys lounged there and talked, recalling the events preceding the war with Spain, and during the time of Weyler's rule.

Maro wondered if his friend would ever get entirely over his belief that Clawson meditated

evil against them, and imagined he would see Teddy circulating around many a lonely camp-fire in the heart of the Everglades, endeavoring to locate some suspicious sound, under the belief that it proceeded from the scheming, unscrupulous skipper of the defunct *Nancy Lee*.

Of course they went ashore, for the opportunity of visiting this gay Cuban capital comes not every day, and may not lightly be cast aside. There were many things they wanted to see, and which they had of necessity only known through print. Besides, the little boat plying between Miami and the Cuban metropolis was late that day, and they would have plenty of time to effect the transfer of the *Loon* in the afternoon. So they landed at a famous dock and proceeded to take in as much of the city as could be done during a limited stay.

Dining at the finest hotel, Maro spent half an hour in writing an account of his adventures, which letter he forwarded to a lawyer friend in Boston, with instructions to do what he consid-

ered best in the premises, looking to an upheaval in the spring, when the writer intended to make it hot for his uncle, with the idea of ousting him from his post as guardian.

It might as well be stated right here that the lawyer commenced proceedings against Uncle Simon, with the intention of placing him under the scrutiny of the court, so that, if warned through his villainous colleague, Clawson, he could not take advantage of Maro's absence to turn any of the estate into money and fly the country. Maro eventually had him removed, and the court appointed as guardian one in whom the lad had every confidence, so that he could be sure of coming into his inheritance when of age.

This all occurred in the spring, for he spent the balance of the winter in company with his friend, just as though matters of money occupied but a small share of his thoughts, which was just like a boy. And they did have a genuine picnic, to be sure, knocking about in those numerous mysterious lagoons which may be found

around the river known under the name of Miami; and later in the season making their way by railroad to Lake Worth, where the cedar boat was again wedded to the water, and their cruise toward the north began.

There was not much of the far-famed Indian river that this daring couple failed to explore. They fished and hunted and feasted on the best that might be found in this favored land, the fruits of the soil and of the sea paying toll to their purse, or their prowess as disciples of Isaak Walton and Nimrod. It paid for all the discomforts which they had suffered during the period of their marooning on that lone sand-key; and yet, while there were many unpleasant things connected with that experience, as usual these would be forgotten as time wore on, and only the delightful happenings remembered. Indeed, even the discomforts can be changed into humorous episodes, affording a good laugh whenever the tale is retold.

And here we may safely leave those whose

fortunes it has been our pleasure to follow through these pages, confident that they possess the sterling qualities of manliness to carry them successfully through life's struggles.

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